

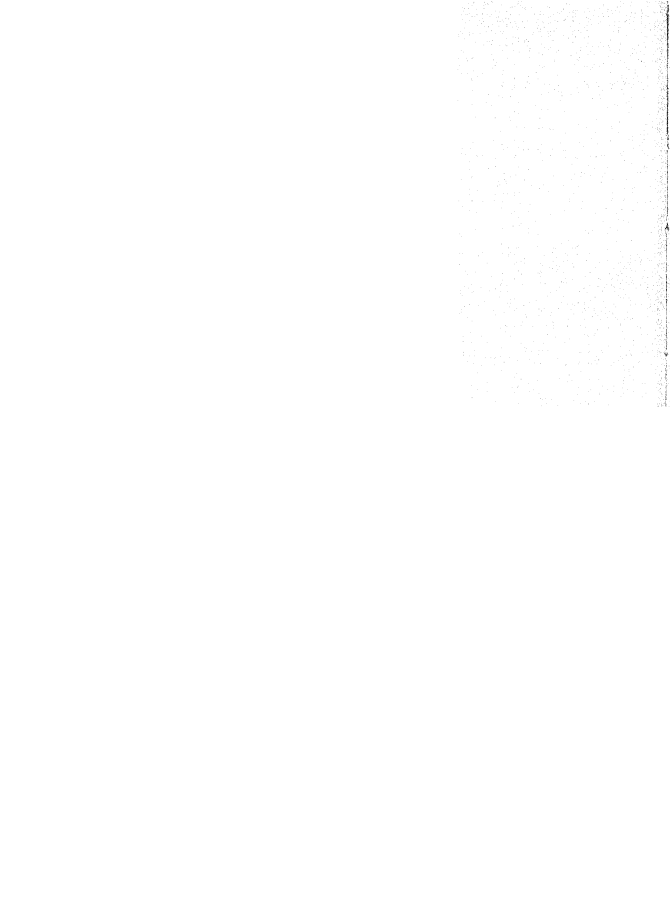
*John Cowper Powys*

A PHILOSOPHY  
OF SOLITUDE



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# Contents

## PREFACE

I

WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN—WHY OLDER AMERICAN WRITERS CANNOT HELP THE MODERN CITY-DWELLER—AND SOME WRITERS WHO CAN—THE INDIVIDUAL MIND CAN CREATE ITS OWN HAPPINESS.

## I. THE SELF AND THE PAST

9

PAST SAGES OF SOLITUDE—THE DOCTRINE OF THE TAO—THE WEeping PHILOSOPHER—THE STOIC PHILOSOPHER—THE PHILOSOPHER-KING—ROUSSEAU AND THE VOLUPTUOUSNESS OF SOLITUDE—THE ELEMENTALISM OF WORDSWORTH—SUMMARY.

## 2. THE SELF ISOLATED

37

"I AM I"—THE MODERN DISTRUST OF THE SOUL—WHY TAKE LIFE FOR GRANTED?—CREATE AN ORIGINAL SELF—THE HERD-MIND—EVOKING THE LONELY SELF—ALIEN MINDS.

## 3. THE SELF REALIZED

65

THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES—A FRESH START—THE ART OF A SOLITARY LIFE—OUR LIFE-ILLUSION—OURSELVES AND THE PAST—A NEW BIRTH—"PREMEDITATED ECSTASY"—THE WILL TO HAPPINESS—AN EXAMPLE.

## 4. THE SELF AT BAY

102

OUTWITTING THE FIRST CAUSE—THE ETERNAL WIND—THE ABSOLUTE—THE ETERNAL WORLD—FORGETTING—THE ILLUSION OF POSSESSION—THE CALM OF CONTEMPLATION—"INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY"—THE SELF AT BAY.

5. THE SELF AND "THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS  
THE WORLD" 131

WE MUST BRING BACK PHILOSOPHY—A PHILOSOPHY OF  
OUR OWN—A STATIC VIEW OF LIFE—FORGETTING OUR  
REAL SELVES—PSYCHOANALYSIS—A PHILOSOPHY OF WALK-  
ING—NATURE THE REFUGE—NATURE THE AVENGER—  
THE INFLUENCE OF THE INANIMATE—ANIMAL-VEGETA-  
BLE CONSCIOUSNESS—MALAISE—RELIGION AND LUST—  
TWILIGHT—THE ULTIMATE MYSTERY.

6. THE SELF AND ITS LOVES 180

OUR LINK WITH OTHERS—THE SECRET REVOLUTION—  
SIMPLIFY THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE—LOVE—THE TYRANNY  
OF THE HEAP—THE BED-ROCK FLOOR—THREE-QUARTERS  
OF AN HOUR.

7. THE SELF AND THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE 204

A "FORMULA"—THINKING OF OUR SKELETONS—WHAT  
CAN "ELEMENTALISM" DO FOR YOU?—OUR WICKEDNESS  
—THE CONTEMPT OF FATE—SIMPLIFYING HAPPINESS—  
THE ART OF SELF-TRANSMUTATION—THE MIND AS A  
MAGICIAN.

# Preface

WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN . . . WHY OLDER AMERICAN  
WRITERS CANNOT HELP THE MODERN CITY-DWELLER . . .  
AND SOME WRITERS WHO CAN . . . THE INDIVIDUAL MIND  
CAN CREATE ITS OWN HAPPINESS

I CAME to write this book in order to find out whether I could articulate certain feelings that I had had since very early days with sufficient clarity, and justify them with sufficient force, as to make out of them a kind of incantation which should serve to drive away from other natures, kindred to my own, the particular demons that I have suffered from, throughout my long years of lecturing in the large cities of this country.

The fact that I have been lucky enough to escape from such an existence and to revert to a more natural life has seemed to lay upon me, as a grateful offering to the fates, the labour of trying to supply those who are still in the situation from which I have escaped with a certain number of magic formulae by which their worst devils may be exorcised.

I thus write from what I know, from an accumulation of resistances to modern life that have solidified themselves into a mental habit, until all that the rea-

son can do is to defend and explain what already exists as an instinctive method.

The question of course arises at the start, why cannot the inspiring works already written by the great Americans of the Past serve to endow those who are forced to live in these large cities and in their lively suburbs with the tricks and devices of the spirit by which they may preserve their souls in peace? I will tell you why. Because these older American writers have the kind of optimism, and the kind of faith, and the kind of cheerfulness, that modern life has not only killed in us, but has replaced by certain bitter and sardonic moods which must find expression in our philosophy.

It is a profound psychological truth that the words of a moral optimist are futile mockery to a neurotic pessimist. It is like telling a person who feels despair that if he makes the grimaces of happiness he will be happy!

Place in the hands of any harassed megalopolitan of our time the large, luminous, aerial perspectives of Emerson's calm thoughts, gathered out of the air as he rode on horseback through a virgin continent or traversed the resinous, pure-breathing pine-woods of his native New England, and it will be very doubtful if the spirit could be fed, or any happiness stolen for

## PREFACE

the jangled nerves, from this pellucid fountain of sweetness and strength.

And Thoreau too. Admire as much as you please this brave, sturdy, honourable, and independent man. He deserves all your veneration. But he does not serve our turn.

What we want just now, surrounded as we are by the Gargantuan monstrosities and Dantesque horrors of our great modern cities are Sayings that have, so to speak, gone through the mill, Sayings that have something of the silt and the sediment of Erebus and Tartarus in them, Sayings that, even if they don't bleed in our presence, wear shirts with spikes on them underneath their modern clothes. What we want is something more concrete and definite than Emerson's noble and universal oracles; yes, and something a great deal less exuberant than Walt Whitman's world-swallowing salutes and indiscriminate acceptations!

No one who has lived for a decade in a large American city could rise to the pitch of Walt Whitman's splendid and flowing "yes!" to such a Pandemonium. Human nature would simply crack under the strain, under the vast hypocrisy—for it would be no less—of giving an assent to such a Malebolge. And moreover we are so driven to the wall in a great modern city,

and so deafened by the tumult, and so drunken upon shameless sex and deadly liquor, and so scoriated in our nerves by the gregarious confusion, that the only thing that can really help us is a much more definite and drastic philosophy than these eloquent writers supply; a real, hard, formidable, unrhetorical philosophy, a philosophy of introspection, of metaphysical introspection, that gets down to the granite rock-bed of the ultimate situation when it is stripped and stark and bare.

It is for this reason that in my first chapter I have gathered together various rather bleak and austere Logoi from writers who themselves in their day were faced by conditions not less difficult than our own. Such suggestive and concentrated Sayings serve our present age, with its hopeless lack of scholarship, much better than laborious and futile attempts to apply the great elaborate systems of Kant or Hegel or Bergson or Croce to our distracted time.

Things are so bad that what we must have are clear, definite mental gestures, that themselves have gone through the mêlée, and like old tattered battle-torn flags bring us fighting symbols rather than rational systems.

It will be noticed that I begin with the Taoist thinkers; and there is a reason for this. Alone among all

## PREFACE

the heathen soothsayers who help us to attain solitude in the midst of the crowd these superior men are free from pride, from conceit, from vanity! When one considers the actual philosophical illumination that humility—regarded as an organ of research—enables us to attain, “it is very sad,” as Kwang-Tze would say, to detect the towering pride of almost all these lonely sages.

To protect ourselves from such philosophical opacity of vision—a peculiarly masculine fault; for feminine sages, like the Sybil of Heraclitus, seem quite free from it—it is advisable never to lose touch, however devoid of faith we may be, with the teachings and examples of the Christian Saints. What, in fact, we are seeking in labour and sorrow from Philosophy, Religion was wont to supply as a spontaneous grace; and whether we have faith or not it is mere obstinacy, pride and conceit, as the profound and terrifying Dostoevsky has warned us, to refuse to make use of the psychological and mystical insight of the Christian Saints. Let us use them therefore for purely intellectual purposes—if we cannot use them for any other!—and thus learn the subtle spiritual trick, for the life of the intellect requires all manner of abysmal Machiavellian devices, of tempering our stoical “contemptus profani vulgi” with a few drops of that intoxicating sweetness of

*read*



humility without which an ecstasy is rarely attained.

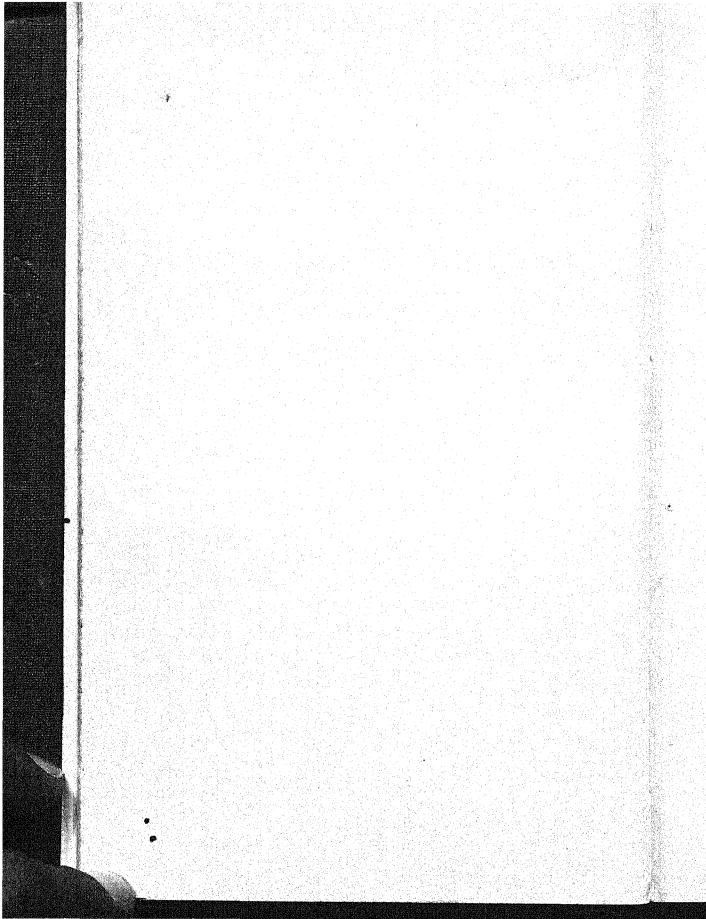
If my procedure, when it comes to my own attempts to simplify the basic aspects of self-consciousness, seem too childish and too ignorant of the latest technical phraseology, the reader must remember that this book is intended to be a modern "Encheiridion," or "Hand-book of Contemplation under Difficulties," and that for this reason the more primitive and concrete, and the less abstract and logical, my metaphysic is, the better for my purpose. The great Metaphysicians are not only too abstract and technical for simple minds to use. They are also too moral, too ideal, too pure-minded.

What we need in America, where atrocities are so constantly being practised, even by the very officers of the law without exciting any particular surprise, is a philosophy of grim stoical endurance, of precisely that stoical endurance of which the taciturn and formidable race who inhabited this land before we appeared in it seem to have had a full share; and in which our African serfs, who indeed bitterly need it, are not wanting.

Let us therefore—even in the midst of our vulgar civilization—sink into our own souls and be alone with that Solitude that can create and destroy without the help of any violence. The power of the individual mind to create its own happiness, from the barest,

## PREFACE

starkest, simplest surrounding, is something that the early Christian mystics possessed. They had God to fall back upon; but we, if lacking God, have at least the cosmic elements. These great presences have a singular value for that psychic-sensuous contemplation which is the secret of lasting human happiness. When you concentrate upon these things it is as if you were aware of another Dimension through thinner walls than exist anywhere else in the Cosmos, and thus were able to tap some reservoir of unfathomable power, from which a mysterious life-magnetism can pour through your whole being.



## THE SELF AND THE PAST

PAST SAGES OF SOLITUDE... THE DOCTRINE OF THE TAO...  
 THE WEEPING PHILOSOPHER... THE STOIC PHILOSOPHER...  
 THE PHILOSOPHER-KING... ROUSSEAU AND THE VOLUPTU-  
 OUSNESS OF SOLITUDE... THE ELEMENTALISM OF WORDS-  
 WORTH... SUMMARY

BEFORE coming down, in concrete and practical details, to any clear-cut system of our own, it were wise to gather together out of the Past a certain number of illustrious authorities; from each of whom, in their due order, some particular aspect of the art of retaining our Solitude in the midst of the Crowd can be appropriated to our purpose. None of these by themselves, nor indeed all of them together, can supply the place of an original philosophy of our own. This each individual must, out of his separate experience, formulate for himself. But towards the creation of such a philosophy every one of these sages will be found capable of supplying some invaluable assistance, if we make use of them with a free, sceptical, independent, personal approach.

The chapters which follow this introduction are an

attempt, by one individual mind, to re-formulate this wisdom of the past in terms of our present difficulties. What one soul can do, others can do; and though our conclusions are bound to be very different, the grand need of our age is that we should all make the attempt to become, in our own measure and after our own fashion, the creators, by thought and habit, of some drastic and independent way of life.

It is from the doctrines of the Tao, as taught by Laotze, that one of the earliest and subtlest expositions of the art of philosophical solitude reaches us. Although Laotze wrote the Tao Teh King, which is the noblest classic of the lonely wisdom, it does not seem that he did more in this work than give a personal and an original twist to ideas that had come down to him from antiquity; and since he himself was born B. C. 604 it will be seen how remote that antiquity must have been!

That Laotze was a supreme example of the anti-social type of mystical thinker is clear from the legend that tells us that it was only because the Warden of the City-Gate refused to let him hide himself in the wilderness till he had written his book that he was persuaded to write it at all. The Tao itself seems to have been at one and the same time the innermost

secret of life and the most subtle way of life; and in some respects—for there are allusions to its metaphysical Femininity—it occupies the same mystical place in the system of things as that occupied by “The Moth-ers” in Goethe’s “Faust.”

The essence of the doctrine of the Tao seems to be that it is through withdrawing ourselves rather than asserting ourselves, through retreating rather than advancing, through yielding rather than pursuing, through inaction rather than through action, through becoming quiet rather than through making a stir, that we attain wisdom and spiritual power.

Laotze teaches that we should cultivate the art of reducing our self-assertion to the supreme limit. He insists that we should un-learn our superficial cleverness and not only cease competing with others, but flow with them and into them, and through them, and lose our identity in their presence, deliberately becoming undistinguished, unimportant, insignificant—but thus becoming the most magical of magicians!

“The skilful masters of the Tao in old times, with a subtle and exquisite penetration, comprehended its mysteries, and were deep also so as to elude men’s knowledge. As they were thus beyond men’s knowledge, I will make an effort to describe of what sort they appeared to be. . . . Shrinking looked they, like

those who wade through a stream in winter; irresolute, like those who are afraid of all around them; grave like a guest in awe of his host; evanescent like ice that is melting away; unpretentious like wood that has not been fashioned into anything; vacant like a valley, and dull like muddy water. . . . The state of vacancy should be brought to the utmost degree, and that of stillness guarded with unwearying vigour. . . . When things have displayed their luxuriant growth we see each of them return to its root. This returning to their root is what we call the state of stillness; and that stillness may be called a reporting that they have fulfilled their appointed end."

Kwang-Tze, Laotze's most famous interpreter, lived in the latter half of the third century B. C. and if the Warden of the Gate found it difficult to persuade Laotze to remain in Society, the Sovereign of his country found it impossible to persuade Kwang-Tze to leave his retirement. Kwang-Tze is one of the profoundest, as he is also one of the most humorous, of all mystical writers. With "quips and cranks and wanton wiles," and with an indescribable sub-irony that is deep as life and as erratic as life, he defends his master Laotze and makes whimsical sport of Confucius.

There is a delicate mixture of the sardonic and the

artless in the thoughts of Kwang-Tze, and with these there is a far-away, almost elfin metaphysic, that reduces all the heavy pomposity of solid practical life, both where events and where persons are concerned, into something airy, fantastic, insubstantial. But there is the very truth of the spiritual chaoticism of things in Kwang-Tze's writings. To his mind it is impossible to simplify and clarify the issues too much, or to become too childish in our peaceful fetish-worship or in our solitary lying back upon the Heaven and the Earth.

There is a sublime and, at the same time, a quaintly humorous quietism about the rambling wisdom of Kwang which lends itself more beautifully than the mood of any other sage to a cult of the Four Elements. One or two quotations will very quickly convey the airy essence of his mystic fancy. The following concerns the art of Government. "When wearied I mount on the bird of the light and empty air . . . and wander in the region of non-entity, to dwell in the wilderness of desert space. . . . Let your mind find its enjoyment in pure simplicity. Blend yourself with the primary ether in idle indifference; allow all things to take their natural course; and admit no personal or selfish consideration:—do this and the world will be governed."



Over and over again does Kwang teach us how superior is stupid contemplation to any lively or clever reasoning. "When water is still it is a perfect Level and the greatest artificer takes his rule from it. Such is the clearness of still water, and how much greater is that of the human Spirit! The still mind of the sage is the mirror of heaven and earth, the glass of all things. Vacancy, stillness, placidity, tastelessness, quietude, silence, and non-action; this is the Level of heaven and earth, and the perfection of the Tao and its characteristics. . . . Vacancy, stillness, placidity, tastelessness, quietude, silence, and doing nothing are the root of all things."

With the active busy-body virtue, inculcated by Confucius, Kwang-Tze is out of sympathy. He thus addresses that great man. "If you, Master, wish men not to be without their shepherding, think of Heaven and Earth, which certainly pursue their invariable course; think of the sun and moon . . . think of the stars in the zodiac, which preserve their order and courses. And think of the trees which do not fail to stand up in their places."

One is reminded here of that passage in Matthew Arnold's "Self-Reliance":—

*Unaffrighted by the silence round them,  
Undistracted by the sights they see  
These demand not that the world about them  
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy;*

*But with joy the stars perform their shining,  
And the sea its long, moon-silvered roll,  
For self-poised they live, nor pine with noting  
All the fever of some differing soul.*

Heraclitus of Ephesus, sometimes called "the Weeping Philosopher," who lived about 500 B. C., possesses in those fragments of his sayings that have come down to us a mystical and yet terribly realistic penetration. There is something about his thought which is at once startling and a little sinister. It is lonely too, and very austere; grim and yet strangely exhilarating.

Both Hegel and Nietzsche—the extreme opposites in philosophizing—turn to Heraclitus with awe and respect. It is hard to believe that Goethe himself was not influenced by some of these arresting and formidable "Logoi."

Proud and fierce in his loneliness was Heraclitus. All the legends of him, and also the life of him, by Diogenes Laertius, give the impression of a man who had contempt for "crowd-consciousness" and for all

the current notions of the pseudo-science of his day. "He became," says Diogenes Laertius, "a hater of his kind, and wandered on the mountains, and there he continued to live, making his diet of grass and herbs. . . . He was nobody's pupil but he declared he 'enquired of himself' and learned everything from himself. . . . Here is a summary of his doctrines. All things are composed of fire, and into fire they are again resolved; further all things come about by destiny, and existing things are brought into harmony by the clash of opposing currents; again all things are filled with souls and divinities. . . . Another of his sayings is: 'Of soul thou shalt never find boundaries, not if thou trackest it on every path; so deep is its cause.' . . . All things come into being by conflict of opposites, and the sum of things flows like a stream. . . . We are told that when asked why he kept silence, he replied, 'Why, to let you chatter.' . . . He refused the invitation of King Darius to come to Persia and wrote . . . 'All men hold aloof from truth . . . and devote themselves to avarice and thirst for popularity . . . but I, shunning the general satiety which is joined with envy and because I have a horror of splendour, could not come to Persia, being content with little, when that little is to my mind.'"

Leaving the words of his Biographer, the following

among his "sayings" seem full of a curious significance.

"The Sibyl with raving mouth utters things mirthless, unadorned and unperfumed, but with her voice she extends over a thousand years because of the God."

"Wisdom is one thing—to know the thought whereby all things are steered through all things."

"God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger."

"They understand not how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself. There sits attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the harp."

"A man's character is his fate."

"The name of the bow is life, but its work is death."  
(*Tou biou ounoma bios, ergon thanatos*).

Epictetus, the Stoic Philosopher, was born at Hierapolis in Phrygia, and became a slave of Epaphroditus, a freedman and favourite of Nero. Under him he is said to have suffered very much like a chain-gang Negro with us, or a victim of the method known as "the Third Degree."

When Domitian, however, with a tyrant's natural loathing of thinkers, decreed in 94 A. D. that all philosophers must leave Rome, Epictetus, now himself a freedman, retired to Nicopolis in Epirus where

Flavius Arrianus made copious notes of his oral teaching—for he himself wrote nothing—and from these notes compiled the Treatise entitled "Encheiridion" or Hand-Book.

According to the teaching of the Stoics Thought and Matter are eternal and parallel and cannot be separated. The inmost essence of life is Fire—or, as our modern science would call it, electronic vibration—and this quintessential life-energy is at once material and possessed of consciousness and will-power. This universal and primordial World-Being is God, and our human purpose is to live according to its divine intention; which means, in plainer words, to live according to Nature which is the Body of God. Although both our human body and our human soul are ultimately composed of this divine universal substance; yet our soul, by reason of its purer essence, lies much closer to this original First Cause, and is indeed an actual living flame of the great Cosmic Fire. The first grand doctrine of Epictetus is the doctrine of the simplification of human life. We are told that he himself, when he retired to Nicopolis, never had any servant, or indeed any other person, in his house, until he rescued an infant, who had been exposed to perish, when he was driven by necessity to hire a nurse.

To strip oneself of superfluities is the great secret

of happiness; and chief among superfluities are all those thousand and one appearances of things that can be forgotten if we make an effort of the will. The important thing is to lay all the stress upon the mind and the will; and thus, by the elimination of "appearances," live entirely in those larger, simpler, more permanent elements of our perception that are unaffected by chance or change.

Epictetus who lived in days singularly like our own—and not for nothing has Spengler detected these grim resemblances—lays his chief stress upon what the individual can do in such bad times by the simple use of his will. We may have little control over external and material things. But these external things are, after all, only what our mental impression of them is; and thus, though we have little power over destiny, we have a most miraculous power over our own mind, to think this or that, to think away this or that. However badly things are going in our outward circumstances, as when Epaphroditus, like an officer of the law with us, felt a lively urge to cruelty, Epictetus held that we can, by a sublime effort of our magnetic will—that nucleus of the divine fire within us—detach our consciousness from these horrible proceedings and endure them as though we endured them not.

The whole doctrine of Epictetus can be reduced to

these few grand hints as to how to bear up under the brutal vulgarity of our modern Epaphrodituses:—Reduce your own possessiveness to the limit, simplify your own life to the limit, and concentrate upon the power of your own mind, which is itself a portion of that Divine Fire that creates and destroys all things.

A few passages from Arrian's Epictetus translated by Rolleston for the "Scott Library," will quickly give an impression of the way he expressed these doctrines.

"It is shameful for a man to begin and to end where creatures do that are without reason, but rather should he begin when they begin and end where Nature ends in ourselves. But she ends in contemplation, in observing and studying, in a manner of life that is in harmony with Nature. See to it then that ye die not without having been spectators of these things."

"If thou set thine heart upon philosophy, prepare straightway to be laughed at and mocked by many who will say, Behold he has suddenly come back to us a philosopher; or, How came you by that brow of scorn?"

There seems something peculiarly adapted to our case about the ideas of Epictetus, when, just as in his day, we are all so brow-beaten by officials, persecuted by petty tyrants, threatened by brute violence.

"But the tyrant will bind—what? The leg. He will take away—what? The head. What then can he not bind and not take away? The Will. And hence that precept of the ancients—Know Thyself."

"Think you, you can be a sage, and continue to eat and drink and be wrathful and take offence just as you were wont? Nay, but you must watch and labour and withdraw yourself from your household, and be despised by any serving boy, and be ridiculed by your neighbours, and take the lower place everywhere, in honours, in authority, in courts of justice, in dealings of every kind."

"Thou art no Hercules, and canst not purge away evils not thine own. Then clear away thine own. From thy mind cast out grief, fear, covetousness, envy, malice, avarice, effeminacy. . . . And these things cannot otherwise be cast out than by looking to God only."

"If thou wouldst advance, be content to let people think thee senseless and foolish as regards external things. Wish not ever to seem wise, and if ever thou shalt find thyself accounted to be somebody, then mistrust thyself. For know that it is not easy to make a choice that shall agree both with outward things and with Nature, but it must needs be that he who is careful of the one shall neglect the other."



"The tokens of one that is making advance: he blames none, he praises none, he accuses none, he complains of none; he speaks never of himself as being somewhat, or as knowing aught. When he is thwarted or hindered in aught he accuseth himself."

There is undoubtedly a special tone in Epictetus, a particular vein, that has a deep psychological resemblance to the streak of grim asceticism, one might even call it puritanism, that appeared so soon in Christianity itself, and destroyed the more expansive beauty of that Religion's early beginnings; but with this there is a certain rugged and humorous toughness that reminds us a little of Socrates; though it has nothing of the subtler Ionian irony, and certainly has nothing of the Socratic susceptibility to physical charm.

Yes, it must be confessed that Epictetus has it in him, like other famous puritans, to utter harsh, stark, grim sayings; but I will conclude with a characteristic quotation from his remarks on "Solitude" which is most germane to my own matter.

"The door is opened, and God saith to thee, Depart. Whither? To nothing dreadful, but to the place from whence thou camest—to things friendly and akin to thee, to the elements of Being. Whatever in thee was fire shall go to fire; of earth, to earth; of air, to air; of water, to water; no Hades, nor Acheron, nor Coccy-

tus, nor Phlegethon, but all things are full of Gods and Powers. Whoso hath these things to think on and seeth the sun and the moon and the stars and rejoiceth in the earth and the sea he is no more solitary than he is helpless."

—"What, then, if one come and find me alone and slay me? Fool! not thee, but thy wretched body. Thou art a little soul bearing up a corpse."

Marcus Aurelius was born on the twenty-fifth of April A. D. 121 and died on the seventeenth of March A. D. 180. He came of a noble Roman family that was originally Spanish; and the supernaturally far-sighted sensualist and aesthete, Hadrian, arranged before his death that his own successor, Antoninus Pius, should adopt him as his son; and it was thus that he became Emperor. The "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius is the saddest, the most disillusioned, the most tragic, of all spiritual self-colloquies.

He accepts the whole grim Stoic Philosophy without a qualm . . . the universal, unsympathetic, inhuman Reason, sweeping everything before it . . . the eternal recurrence of all things . . . the soul only briefly surviving the death of the body . . . the necessity of making oneself indifferent to both pain and pleasure.

Nothing in the history of philosophy is more interesting than to analyze the strange psychological difference between Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius—one slave, the other Emperor. Through all the harshness and roughness and puritanical downrightness of Epictetus you feel that the man—like Socrates—was enjoying his philosophy with a stalwart gusto and a rugged relish for “the pleasure which there is in life itself.”

The ex-slave's humorous and Diogenes-like love of solitude and then his whimsical and tender adoption of an exposed infant for whom so unwillingly he had to hire a nurse, seem to spring from a certain zest and a certain earthy relish for existence, even on the barest and simplest terms! The Stoic Philosophy in his hands, in spite of its harsh and forbidding elements, takes on a sort of rough, homely, comfortable complacency and a kind of cottage-fire glow.

But the great Emperor's deepest nature reveals itself in his “Thoughts” as hopelessly, incurably sad. How was this? Well! It is one of the psychological mysteries. But as you ponder over the “Meditations” and compare this book with the “Encheiridion,” you feel that Aurelius is one of the weariest, saddest, most heartbroken Stoics who ever lived. Here is indeed a philosopher for the unhappy; for he himself was un-

speakably unhappy. Here is a spiritual psychiatrist for the neurotic; for on this world-burdened and life-weary brow sit all the mental tragedies of all *les grands nerveux* who have ever turned away with distaste or loathing from the long, heavy game.

And it is just because of this ice-cold pool of despair underlying all his labours and honours and triumphs that the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius are more congruous with our present age, and "square" better—as Wordsworth would say—with our present-day mood, than the luminous serenity of Emerson, the robust and sturdy cheerfulness of Thoreau, the thaumaturgic optimism of Whitman. Somehow when one turns from the miseries and brutalities of the age we live in to seek refuge in Philosophy all three of these great Americans seem at once too high-spirited and too level-headed.

We need, just now, a certain fierce, bitter, indignant philosophy, a philosophy that is neither too easy-going towards the gods for the sort of world they have made, nor towards ourselves for the folly with which we make the bad worse. We need to put into our cosmic philosophy a little of the black bile that we put into our human relations. We need a certain bone to bone austerity in our mental vision combined with a new

emphasis upon the power of the will and the magic of the will.

In other words—for why should not we, as well as Hegel, make use of Heraclitus?—we need “dry light.” “Dry light is the wisest and best soul.”

Where Marcus Aurelius is such a healing psychiatrist to us today is that he is himself a nervous, fatigued, neurotic oversensitized modern character, disillusioned to the uttermost depths of his being, with no exuberant hopes as to what his universal Divine Fire, or Supreme Reason, intends to do for its unhappy short-lived, frustrated, mortal creations, and with no flicker of pride in his own morale.

In one place he cries out:—“O my soul, my soul! Wilt thou never attain to goodness and simplicity, oneness and nakedness, and shine through the bars of thy bodily prison? Wilt thou never taste the sweets of a character loving and affectionate? never know satiety and self-sufficiency, with every craving gone and not one lingering desire for aught, quick or dead, that serves the lusts of the flesh; seeking no temporal respite for longer enjoyment, no pleasant places, no favoured clime, no congenial society——”

In another place you can so well catch his fainter, sadder, more sophisticated intonation, as he actually uses Epictetus' own word:— “Childish quarrels, child-

ish delights, little souls laden with corpses—all in order that the Death-Masque may strike our eyes more clearly!"

The truth is that the abysmal pessimism of Marcus Aurelius does not really derive much comfort from the non-human march forward of his vast impersonal Reason, carrying the world from cosmic death to cosmic birth in cycle after cycle.

When you compare the desolate resignation of his melancholy accents—rising only once, in the famous passage about "the City of God," to anything like a religious ecstasy—with the exultant enthusiasm of Emerson for his Over-Soul, you cannot help feeling that the buoyancy of the Christian Faith has inspired even non-Christian thinkers with something of its irrational defiance of destiny. But it is just because of this great Stoic's sense of the futility of all things, that his stress upon the power of the will is so important to us. One feels that just as Aurelius could endure life and sink back into his own soul with the help of Fate, so we, with nothing but the aid of the Inanimate Elements, can sink back upon the magic of our individual will in defiance of Fate.

How different from Goethe's christianized Paganism, with its energetic and cheerful "Think of Living!" is the life-weary detachment—and yet with a

sublime heroism of its own—of a sentence like this:—  
“Think of thyself as one that is dead,—one whose existence is now closed, and live the days that are left thee in harmony with Nature, as though they were but a sequel to thy life.”

It is a far cry from the antique Stoics to Jean Jacques Rousseau; but it is Rousseau's peculiar susceptibility to the overtones and undertones of a life “according to Nature” that fills out and softens what is somewhat harsh and forbidding in the great Stoic Manuals. What we really learn from Rousseau is an inestimable secret, without the enjoyment of which a life in communion with the Elements might seem so bleak and austere that it could attract few. We learn from Rousseau the art of enjoying a certain romantic life-illusion; in other words a certain dramatic sense of the cosmic situation, a feeling of life as something consciously and artfully simplified, with an imaginative after-thought of its poetic value as thus simplified.

Left bare and stark by Epictetus and Aurelius, the feeling of living a detached and solitary life in touch with earth, air, water, and fire, and with the Mystery behind these presences, becomes in Rousseau, with his dogma of “the equality of all souls,” and his incomparable trick of associating an amorous and intellec-

tual life with a life of sensuous contemplation, something romantic, something with a vague, evasive horizon, full of those magical and half-realized feelings that float on the border-air between sense and spirit.

It will only be necessary to quote a few lines from the Sixth Book of the Confessions to awake in my readers that peculiar reciprocity of lonely, romantic, erotic, ego-centric feelings, which might be called the very voluptuousness of solitude; such feelings—for he too was one to enjoy them well—as made that misanthropical essayist Hazlitt cry out, to his friends' astonishment, when he came to die: "Well! I've had a happy life!"

Rousseau begins the Sixth Book of his Confessions by the passage from the Second Satire of Horace which speaks of a small piece of land with a garden, a stream of running water near the house, and a little wood; and he goes on:—"I did not even need any property at all; the enjoyment of it was enough for me, and I have long ago said and felt, that the proprietor and the possessor are often two very different persons; even if one leaves husbands and lovers out of the question! At this period commences the brief happiness of my life; here approach the peaceful but rapid moments that have given me the right to say, I have lived. . . . I got up at sunrise and was happy; I



walked, and was happy; I roamed the forests and hills, I wandered in the valleys, I read, I did nothing, I worked in the garden, I picked the fruit, I helped in the house, and happiness followed me everywhere—happiness which could not be referred to any definite object, but dwelt entirely within myself and which never left me a single instant.”

Before the end of the *Confessions* we find Rousseau driven to take refuge on the island of Saint-Pierre in the middle of the Lake of Bièvre where there was only one solitary dwelling-house. Here he gave himself up to a veritable orgy of that psychic-sensuous contemplation that made him happier than anything else in life, and to which at the very last he returned so calmly again. It was the study of Botany, following the system of Linnaeus, that gave him his most successful excuse for these ecstasies of sensual contemplation. But even of Linnaeus he writes:—“He has studied too much from gardens and collections of dried plants, and too little from nature herself. I, whose garden was the whole island, as soon as I required to verify some observation, ran into the woods or meadows with a book under my arm; there I threw myself upon the ground by the side of the plant in question to examine it where it stood at my leisure. Frequently, leaving my boat at the mercy of the wind

and water, I abandoned myself to aimless reveries which, although foolish, were none the less delightful. I cried out in an ecstasy, 'O nature! O my mother! Behold me under thy protection alone! Here there is no cunning knave to thrust himself between thee and me.' "

There is to a Nordic mind, it must be allowed, a certain vein of social self-consciousness in Rousseau, which, though not derogating from his perfectly authentic emotions when alone with Nature, gives them, I will not say a theatrical turn, for his feelings are really quite artlessly innocent, but a dramatic turn, which is entirely alien to the sort of emotion which an Englishman experiences in solitude. And that this may be made the more clear to my readers let us turn straight from Rousseau to the poetry of William Wordsworth.

No poetry requires so much expurgation as Wordsworth's from what is unworthy of a man's genius; but when this has been done, and the tedious moralizing and conventional "pietizing" have been stripped away, out of the residue might be made a veritable breviary for the off-hours of the kind of person I have elected in this book to name an "elementalist."

It was indeed Wordsworth's master-idea—though

he too frequently lapsed from it into all manner of tedious rationalizings—to strip human life of all unessentials and to visualize individual men and women in the solemn dignity of their isolation in the presence of the elements. His philosophical thought, at its best, followed his temperamental instinctive impulses; and these led him to find in what he calls "the language of the sense" the deepest ecstasy of the contemplative life.

When his poetry is most magical and most inspired he will be found to be writing of some solitary human figure outlined in a sublime isolation against these mysterious elements. Several of his greatest passages go even further than this and occur when his brooding imagination is occupied purely and solely with the non-human processes of dawn and noon and twilight, and the passing of clouds across the sky, of birds across mountain valleys, and of all the turbulences and taciturnities of winds and waters.

Over and over again Wordsworth will separate from every human association some primordial elemental event—the fiery sun descending into the sea-waves, the grey light falling upon a single stone, the gulfs of empty air surrounding some promontory of bare rock. And when he does introduce human life, while the tide of inspiration is full upon him—"mirthless, un-

adorned and unperfumed" as Heraclitus says of the voice of the Sybil—it is always in order that the tragedy of human suffering should be in some mysterious way ennobled and rendered more endurable by being seen against the background of these cosmogonic presences.

Thus in Wordsworth there is a return to that primal elementalism of the war of the natural forces—earth with water, water with fire, fire with air—which plays a much larger part in the poetry of Homer than criticism hath hitherto had the insight to note, and which is the very beat and pulse of the dark sayings of Heraclitus.

For an "elementalist," as I have dared to define him, there is a comfort in escaping from that vein of sentimentality in nature-worship, with its back-wash of social self-consciousness, that does cling, it must be confessed,—though with all manner of charming and childish whimsicalities—to the misanthropic moods of Rousseau. There is not a touch or trace of sentimentality in Wordsworth's attitude; and over and over again with him we seem to catch glimpses of a stark "animism" that is almost non-human in its bald, bleak and to many tastes forbidding loneliness.

The length to which what I call "elementalism" has been carried by Wordsworth, conveying an undertone

of an almost Red-Indian grimness, can be gathered from the first of that series of four sonnets which he entitles "Personal Talk":—

*"I am not One who much or oft delight  
To season my fireside with personal talk. . . .*

*Better than such discourse doth silence long,  
Long, barren silence square with my desire;  
To sit without emotion, hope, or aim,  
In the loved presence of my cottage-fire  
And listen to the flapping of the flame,  
Or kettle whispering its faint under-song."*

Emphatically, again and again, does Wordsworth indicate that it is from that middle region of our nature where dwell our animal passivities and our moods of vegetative quiescence, a region that is neither sub-conscious nor yet rational, a region which might be called—twisting Gertrude Stein's words a little—the region of Stupid Being, that the master-currents of our nature rise up, that sweep us away in gusts of primal ecstasy.

These are those "reveries" that Rousseau loved so well, but was a little uneasy about, begging his readers to be indulgent to them, as to a "delightful foolishness."

But with Wordsworth's rugged, tough, taciturn north-country nature, these elemental sensations, so far from being felt as "foolishness," were regarded as the essential secret of life. They constituted the mystical vision, or were at least the path to the mystical vision, which is the object of all religion, of all contemplation, of all morality.

Concluding our brief summary of these various thinkers' contributions to the difficult art of possessing our souls in peace in the midst of gregarious confusion, it would seem that from Laotze we learn to flow imperceptibly through life like running water, while like water we seek our own level in spite of every obstacle; from Kwang-Tze we learn to preserve an ironic detachment from all conceit of place, from all pride of system, from all pretence of moral superiority, while we learn from useless trees, from simple persons, from chance-omens of the way, the Protean art of retaining our identity by losing it; from Heraclitus we learn to keep our inmost being in a fighting mood of tension between opposites, and to despise the idols of the market-place; from Epictetus we learn to simplify our life to the extreme limit and to preserve an equable temper; from Marcus Aurelius to dig down deep into our profoundest souls and to think constantly of the

annihilation of all save "the God" in us; from Rousseau to make it our dominant life-illusion to enjoy the voluptuousness of a sensuous communion with Nature; and finally from Wordsworth to isolate ourselves austere and grimly from the levities and banalities of society and to concentrate upon establishing a mystical relation with the primordial elements, until we get into touch with a Mystery "that disturbs us with the joy of elevated thoughts . . . a sense sublime of Something far more deeply interfused. . . ."

All these things have we appropriated to ourselves in the reading of these sages, but even yet we are still only at the beginning; for this art of falling back upon the basic sensations of planetary awareness, this art of creating for ourselves a continuity of secret happiness in defiance of the world, is an art that needs so many spiritual tricks and devices and evasions, and so much unconquerable obstinacy, that few among us, though we may practise it in spasmodic outbursts, are able to make it the dominant cult of our lives.

What follows in this book is really a sort of mental Diary of one man's attempt to achieve this.

## 2

### THE SELF ISOLATED

"I AM I"...THE MODERN DISTRUST OF THE SOUL...WHY  
TAKE LIFE FOR GRANTED?...CREATE AN ORIGINAL SELF...  
THE HERD-MIND...EVOKING THE LONELY SELF...ALIEN  
MINDS

EVERY human being is alone in the core of the mind. When we are born we cry; and that cry is the cry of loneliness.

Thus it is with children. Thus it is with the growing youth. And the older we grow the lonelier we grow.

The shrewdest advice one soul can give to another is to accept this law of nature.

Yes, we must accept it; and not only accept it, but find our unique and singular happiness in it! Steadily and obstinately we must relate all the mental processes of our days, all our secret reactions to the universe, all the furtive habits we accumulate in our interior nature, to this austere and solemn fact.

If we are inexorably alone when we sink down to rock-bottom, the wisest life is a life "tenon'd and mortis'd" upon loneliness.

By the constant practice of this mental awareness



our reaction to the world will come to rest, not on the shifting sands of human opinion but on the sublime and terrible truth of the ultimate situation. This situation is not changed because in the body we may be surrounded by other bodies. Our inmost self is indeed fatally involved with the personal peculiarities of our material flesh and blood. Our lonely ego is always hemmed in by our own body, and very often by the intrusive and aggressive bodies around us. The life of our soul is cruelly dependent upon our bodily health, upon our idea of ourselves as irrevocably bound to our burdened and exhausted senses. But the fact that every conscious self possesses a central core, a unifying force, an integral identity, the fact that it never loses the feeling of such an identity, implies a constant renewal of our natal solitude; of our inherent isolation, from the security of which we gather ourselves together for our next outrush into sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch and the overpowering pressure of other personalities.

For this central power is not only the mind, the psyche, the self, the ego; it is also the driving force, the energy, the will, the magnetic nucleus of our personality.

Fatally associated with the body and with the senses of the body, as it is, we have no authority to claim for it independence of the flesh or survival of the flesh;

but neither have we any right to assert roundly and finally that it could never win for itself such independence, that it could never win for itself such ulterior survival.

It is indeed so involved with the body that its chief activity seems to be the unifying and focussing of the senses; and yet there come moments when this central power within us seems to withdraw into some mysterious and remote levels of its own being and we feel as if we approached the verge of strange and startling possibilities.

This is a feeling only; but it is connected with a constant sensation that represents an unquestionable fact, the fact namely that we possess a centralizing, unifying self or ego, which is the driving-force of all we think, or do, or feel, or say.

And whatever may be happening to our body this self or ego, the conscious "I am I" within us, is absolutely alone. It is alone from the first moment of its awareness of life to its last moment on the threshold of what may be its final extinction.

The drifting, brainless gregariousness of so many human beings, imitating one another, conciliating one another, admiring, desiring, envying, competing, tormenting one another, is an attempt to escape from this inherent loneliness of the self. Our power of intensify-

ing the isolation of our soul by an effort of our will is something that most human beings too easily forget. But our consciousness is not a phenomenon floating about in a void. There must be some nucleus of magnetic energy to which it adheres. This nucleus, as we grow aware of it, seems connected with the body but at the same time seems to be something different from the body. Linked inseparably with the senses and using the senses, we yet experience an obscure but definite feeling that our consciousness is in touch with levels of reality beyond the visible world.

This feeling is such a constant one that it is natural for us to take for granted that it corresponds to some actual truth amid the infinite richness and thickness of life.

We have only to try the experiment of assuming for a moment that the astronomical world is all there is, to be aware of a rooted conviction in our deeper mind that there are levels of life totally beyond all this. Even as we grasp this world with our senses, or with our reason quickened by science, we feel ourselves to be in touch with something inward as opposed to all this outward, something that transcends, and is quite different from this space-and-time world. This inner, secret knowledge—for it is hard to conceive so calm, continuous, and flowing an awareness, inherent in

the very nature of our consciousness, as a mere opinion, still less an illusion,—belongs to our ego, our inner self; and we are thus led to the conclusion that, though so fatally involved, it is this very consciousness that endows the astronomical world with intelligible unity, just because it—the mind or some portion of the mind—remains outside, and independent of the whole spectacle.

Of this “outside” it can know no more than that it exists, because all the powers of contemplation which the self possesses are drawn from the senses and depend upon the senses. Nevertheless some level of existence outside this material world it is forced to assume; not as a mere theory among other theories, but as a constant assumption, made by necessity, and supplying all our experience with an inalienable background.

Modern philosophy leaves us very often with a vague uneasy distrust of our own living identity, a weary insidious doubt whether there is anything in us at all resembling a clear-eyed master of the creaking and groaning vessel. The only retort to this dubiety is a bold act of faith, repeated so continuously that it becomes a habit. No day, no night should pass without a gathering together of the inmost core of our being with its defiant cry: “Alone with the universe! Alone against the universe!”

The pity is that instead of this diurnal ritual of self-creation, parallel with the old monastic custom of "keeping the hours," we tend to drift along through our disordered days as if there were no living fountain of magnetism within us, welling up from the centre and able to take control.

We treat our ego as if there were some evil law of the universe which forced it to remain diffused, formless, loose, amorphous, helpless in the presence of the moods of others, servile before the opinions of the crowd, invaded and overwhelmed.

Where is the stark solitude of our living "I am I"?

It is broken and outraged, echoing to the clamour of alien thoughts, to the gross tread of alien feet.

There is no such evil law! Once let us take firm hold upon our inheritance of cosmic isolation, and there will rush to our rescue, against these alarms and excursions, such large, cool, clear airs of the great deep as can overcome them all. The nature of the widespread universe is not with what overwhelms us. It is with us. It is with the magical silence that these crowd-thoughts invade.

Significant enough of the disintegrating tendency of modern thought is the disuse of the word "soul" to express our inner nature.

Because the instinctive image-making tendency of old times regarded this "soul" as a spiritual replica of the body, and born to survive the body, we have grown hostile to the very word. Malicious folly! As if any word could be better to express all the secret experiences of the self; its resistances, its creative energies, its furtive withdrawals.

Life is something that we feel, something that we are, and its essence must always escape rational analysis.

All those living experiences, the continuity of which our ancestors indicated in the words "the soul," are not negated or nullified, are not rendered non-existent, because in the fashion of our scientific verbiage we use a different set of phrases. Phrases are nothing. The experiences of life are the important thing: and the unity of this conscious spirit, which is at once the centre and circumference of our whole being, is an unsailable reality. It is in fact the one single reality of which we have a sure and direct knowledge. "Can this be my own hand, my own face, my own body?" we ask. But no one asks:— "Can this be my own soul?" because the question itself implies the existence of the questioner.

We too, like the men of old time, are forced by our very nature to visualize in symbolic images the ex-

periences of our consciousness. Thus I am driven to visualize that hard, resistant, inviolable self which I feel within me as something concrete and definite. I compare it to the hardness, to the loneliness, to the opacity of a crystal, of a pebble, of a stone.

This image-making in my imagination only means that in my own experience I am aware of a central core of inviolability. It does not mean that I am under any delusion that my ego, however selfish, actually resembles a hard, round pebble-stone.

It is by using what used to be called the "will" that we stiffen, harden, crystallize the self as against the whole material universe. The modern philosophies that make a point of disparaging the power of the will need not bother us. Their trivial importance can be judged in its true perspective if the mind takes a long survey of human history and considers the rise and fall of many philosophies, not one of which but has sought to demolish some natural and spontaneous function of the human ego.

To harden and deepen the consciousness of self, to acquire the magical secret of personal happiness, in freedom from external necessity, it is wise to return to the old masters of the classical times.

These ancient sages give us the clue as to how to

look on all present-day thought with a very detached and sceptical eye.

The history of human philosophy is quite enough in itself to teach anyone that it is safe to take for granted that all the philosophical catchwords of our era are of small authority.

A few grains of truth—when we take a large bird's eye view of human life—is all that any particular age is likely to arrive at, and ours is no exception.

One of the chief differences between a consciousness that has had the wit to recognize its planetary isolation and a consciousness that is still a slave to gregarious opinions lies in this matter of respect for modern ideas.

An original mind has no more respect for modern ideas than it has for any other ideas. All ideas are human. All are stamped with the sign-manuals of our race; short-sightedness, maliciousness, prejudice, unimaginative literalness, complacent dogmatism, parrot-like pedantry.

Thus in the first and greatest of all arts, the art of concentrated self-consciousness, the profit to be derived from the utterers of mystical "logoi," from Heraclitus down to Goethe, is far greater than the value which accrues to us from any rounded and completed systems.



The person who makes it the main purpose of life to clarify, concentrate, crystallize his inmost self against the universe, can be immensely assisted in this task by the ideas of the early Greek philosophers, and the early Mediaeval Schoolmen.

It is St. Thomas Aquinas who says, "*Creare proprium personae*," which might be translated, "To create is the prerogative of personality."

St. Thomas is right; but such creation by personality is not done by accident. It is done by practice. It is done by focussing the mind upon the mind, the self upon the self, the life upon the life. It is done by acquiring the habit of doing it. It is done in the beginning by an act of faith and it is done to the last by repeated acts of will.

Here we are—confronted by this sublime and horrible universe—with only one brief life at our disposal, and what must our bemused, bewildered minds do but rush blindfold over the crude surface of experience, taking everything for granted and finding nothing extraordinary in what we see. Extraordinary? We are surrounded by things that are staggering; by things that are so miraculously lovely that you feel they might dissolve at a touch; and by things so unbearably atrocious that you feel you would go mad

if you thought of them for more than the flicker of a second.

Something is wrong with us and it goes deeper than our pathetic docility towards a vulgarized public opinion. We have come to the point of taking life for granted. So much do we take life for granted and so little does life, in its larger, simpler, aspects, interest us any more, that in order to titillate our jaded senses the very arts of our time have to crack their whips, spout bloody flukes like hysterical whales, "make trumpets of their rumps" and skin themselves alive for our delight.

Nothing that we do—dancing our blood-lust dances like frantic mannikins—can compete with the sublime horrors of real life; but it is easier to copy the excrements of Nature than it is to arrest her unspeakable magic. If life's horrors are beyond imitation, as they surely are,—and yet we manage now and again to reproduce a smattering of them—it is certain that her luminous and translunar loveliness is worth a life's struggle in the pursuit of it.

But the truth is that these art-desperations, whether in imitation of life's atrocities or of her glamour, can never take the place of a real life lived from the depths of a person's individual soul.

How often is one driven to feel that all the art of

our day—whether it imitates the horrible or the lovely—is an attempt to distract our intellect away from the much harder undertaking of digging down to the real source of what is wrong. We indeed have to escape from the thought of the horrors of life somehow; for those who pretend they can face them are either lying to others or to themselves.

No man—not even the noblest saint—can face the horror of what can happen, has happened, and is happening to human beings in this world.

For this is the nature of our life upon earth that we can only live by forgetting the intolerable. The transmutations of art serve us but little in our struggle to enjoy and forget; and few artists, in our time, appeal to all. There is an intellectual art for the few—too often obscure and recondite—and there is a popular art, if art it can be called, that ravishes the many. One or two great geniuses alone are left whose work hits the imagination of universal humanity.

The habit of thought and of feeling advocated here under the name “elementalism” is something that causes us to feel wave after wave of recurrent happiness. Such happiness neither regrets nor repines. It neither competes nor envies. It neither complains nor accuses. Nor is it under any compulsion to snatch its

good moments from what is called pleasure. It is itself. It knows itself. It generates itself. It evokes correspondencies of itself in others.

It is easy to show how the isolation of the self, this "guest and companion of the body," increases our happiness; nor would it be difficult to show how it diminishes our griefs.

The isolation of the self gives us the habit of contemplating at every moment the wide swing of the planetary world. It enables us to feel the wind of outer space blow across the surface of our earth as we ride with it through the eternal ether.

It gives a dignity, a beauty, a high and tragic significance to every phenomenon of mortal life. Everywhere it destroys dullness. Everywhere it slays the commonplace. Everywhere it touches with a natural, poetic poignance the ultimate conditions of our existence on this earth.

People can acquire flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, boisterous laughter, while they pursue pleasure in their groups and in their crowds; but it is only in solitude that men and women can come to know the happiness that is like the delight of children in nothing at all.

There are many modern thinkers who emphasize the individual's dependence upon society. It is, on

the contrary, only the cultivation of interior solitude, among crowded lives, that makes society endurable. These isolated selves cannot be recognized, going to and fro among the rest. You cannot recognize them in trolleys, in railways, on pavements, in subways, in shops, in offices, in factories, in theatres, in warehouses. But their will-power broods obstinately in their souls. Their ironic detachment remains inviolate. They are observant and clairvoyant. Their friends say:—"Well! Let her go! We all know how selfish she is; how she prefers to be alone"; or they say:—"Well! Let him go! We all know what a morbid nature he has, and how he has a mania for being by himself."

But these derisive opinions are to these adepts of life no more than a little dust upon the wind!

The art of life consists in the creation of an original and unique self; and this is something that the simplest mind can achieve.

Thought creates a thought-body of its own—a new and spiritual body—which although it is linked in space and time with the material body feels itself to be different, feels itself to be inviolate.

This feeling of the ego's difference from the material form of its body is the important thing.

What we steadily, consciously, habitually think we are, that we tend to become.

*But we all agree with what he says  
the material body is linked in space and time  
with the spiritual body which feels itself to be  
different, feels itself to be inviolate.  
This feeling of the ego's difference from the material  
form of its body is the important thing.*

For the world is not a finished product; it is a creative flux; and what is known as evolution is the multifarious creation of myriads of self-creating wills.

The gregarious intelligence is an intelligence that hinders evolution. Like an ant-heap, for all its lively movement, it is a "mortmain," a dead hand upon the ascent of life.

When the poets and the prophets half-created and half-discovered the Gods, it was out of their own loneliness that this was done.

Not to become an ant-heap but to be lonely like the Gods is the true ideal for a man or a woman; and the weakest, the most degraded, the most unintelligent among us can acquire this divine peculiarity.

There is that in the world that throws up a cloud of dust, of fog, of thick wisps of cloying wool, between the soul's creative receptivity and the primordial elements of the universe. This dust, this fog, this heat-wave, this woolly vapour, hot, sticky, adhesive, is the gregarious projection of the herd-mind.

Only when the soul is alone can the magic of the universe flow through it.

It needs silence for the murmur of the long centuries to grow audible, for the mystery of the cosmic procession to make itself felt.

And this silence can be attained in the maddest hurly-burly of the most crowded city. Material noises, material uproar, cannot interfere with it.

What destroys it are the crowd-thoughts, the vulgar clamour made by the thoughts that are no-thoughts.

Life is full of mysterious Presences voyaging to and fro; Presences that are god-like. But these Presences can only be caught upon their airy journeys by minds that have learnt the secret of being alone.

To converse with the Gods you must become as the Gods; and this means that you must cultivate loneliness. Where "two or three are gathered together" the Gods flee away!

But the body itself, in a metaphorical sense, is always making a noise. The maladies of the body, the privations and surfeits of the body, are like the noises of a kennel. Their persistent yapping breaks the silence of the immortals.

Pain hath its clanging bell, its beating drum, its angry trombone. Murderous is it of the holy silence. But it is easier to learn the art of sinking down into the mind from the noises of pain than to learn the art of escaping from the hubbub of the crowd-consciousness.

The reason why the condition that we call convalescence lends itself to such thrilling happiness is that

of all human conditions convalescence is the most silent, the most simplified, the most lonely.

In convalescence, a touch, a word, a look from a person who sympathizes with us is like the approach of a God to our bedside. The glimpse of a passing cloud, the breath of a wandering wind, the flight of a feather, the scent of a flower, draws tears of incredible happiness from our eyes. In convalescence the world is recreated; and the least coolness upon the air, the least flicker of a flame from the hearth, melts the very bones within us.

The lonely self—isolated and intact—can call up, day by day, the felicitous condition of this heavenly convalescence; for to the mind that is aware of life every hour that passes is an escape from death.

Only those whose interior selves live habitually in loneliness, know—as the convalescent does—the tremulous approaches of human tenderness. This is one of the ultimate paradoxes.

The primeval simplicities of the dignity of life that each man, each woman grows aware of in the austere mystery of solitude are what purge the mind for the welcoming of the most delicate touches of human sympathy.

Only the lonely know the full vibration of a look, a touch, a word, let fall at the moment when most it is needed.



If you want money, go to the poor. If you want sympathy, go to the lonely!

The warm-blooded outpouring of gregarious good-fellowship when the soul is hurt, is like the subjection of a seedling-plant to the hot blaze of noon. What it needs is a few drops of rain from a cloudy sky!

In our deliberate, habitual creation of a lonely self two clear and separate evocations must be emphasized and held firm through all changes.

The first of these is a clear-cut, hard, resistant nucleus of consciousness.

This is the inmost "I am I" within us, felt and known, let us say, as a round, polished, inviolable crystal.

This hard, lonely pebble of the undefeated self is what we need to feel as our "soul" during periods of suffering. This is what we need when the body is subjected to discomfort and the mind to anxiety. This is what we need in wretched habitations, in squalid surroundings, in the workshops and offices of bitter labour, in the thoroughfares of relentless traffic, in destitution and want, and above all when invaded on all sides by the brutal clamour of the crowd-consciousness.

But the second of these—the second imaginary

form, which, in our habitual thinking, we can compel our consciousness of self to take—is, so to speak, a wide circumference of airy memories gathered about this inviolable crystal.

For round and about this undefeated, defiant, detached self there assembles, in the case of everyone, a fluctuating aura of precious memories.

Some of these memories are images of casual sights that have thrilled us in passing; some are the undissolved residue of physical sensations that we have had when we have been happy; some are the avenues and vistas of far-wandering, illuminated thoughts.

The most miserable and harassed among us carry about—wavering and flowing round the hard central self—these airy impressions that we have collected, here and there, from our chaotic, troubled experience.

The miracle of memory is that so much of the bitter dregs, the sour rind, the poisonous pricks, the mephitic fumes, the harsh, hurting accompaniments of these sacred sensations fall away and are lost in retrospect.

A lonely mind must have been very miserable indeed for there not to have accrued to it, when the accompanying poisons are purged away by the passing of time, quite a number of such heavenly essences.

Thus the self-creation of a soul is a two-fold achievement.

Like the projection of a spiritual body, within and around the material body, it creates at one and the same time this hard crystal of central resistance and this fluctuating, wavering nimbus of gathered memories.

With this hard indissoluble centre, with this flowing and undulating circumference, the lonely self is prepared to cope with the world.

Flung up against pain and mockery and brutality it allows its aura of memories to melt away. They will re-form again, quickly enough, this cloud of disembodied images and ideas, when once the immediate tension is removed. They will return like reflections coming back to a pool of water that has been rudely disturbed.

Delivered from ambition, aiming at interior peace rather than glory or success, the isolated self, when it is driven to enter the society of alien minds, consciously avoids taking upon itself their tone, their colour, their aura.

This it does by means of a thousand subtle devices, a thousand cunning tricks. Unwilling to hurt the feelings of these other selves, either by malicious sincerity

or by blunt rudeness, it has found many curious ways of satisfying them without betraying its own identity.

An artless and childish candour is one of its most effective weapons. Once liberated from ambition, a person has nothing to lose by being taken for a fool. There is even an advantage in being actually accepted as worse than a fool; as a nit-wit, an idiot, a harmless ass. Too self-centred to desire to score off or overcome or humiliate another self, such a person only seeks the immediate interest of watching this other ego expand and assert itself after its own fashion.

In its fight for its identity against heavy odds, the soul has acquired one supreme device by which it can escape disintegration under this out-rush of another's personality.

This device is the self-obliteration of its own circumference!

Vigorous, robust, expansive natures cannot refrain from overriding and overwhelming every other self that they approach. They mean no harm. They are not cruel or malicious. They are simply exuberant. Nevertheless in their innocence they are the worst enemy against which the religious solitude of the soul has to be defended! And the self, in its habitual struggle to retain its lonely identity, has been driven to supply itself with this supreme art of self-obliteration.

It does exactly in defense against these invaders what it does when confronted by extreme physical discomfort, by hardship, by pain, by disaster. It obliterates by one annihilating mandate the whole enchanted world of its precious memories!

All the fluctuating images, all the essences, all the magical shapes and sounds and scents of this mysterious aura of its personality it deliberately destroys.

What is the self now under this infliction?

Nothing but a hard, impenetrable crystal, nothing but an adamantine pebble, nothing but a cold, smooth, recalcitrant stone.

But the delicate art of the soul's self-protective conjuring-trick does not stop at this point.

The self at bay has now become so immune to all invasion that it can afford to grow voluble. It makes soothing murmurs under the stream that pours over it!

And although below this conciliatory murmur there always lies—as at the bottom of a rippling current—that impenetrable stone, the invading personality remains unconscious of any impediment to its triumphant self-assertion.

Such is the psychological device by which the identity of the menaced ego defends its solitude.

But it is not only from outside that attacks are made upon our central peace. It is of small avail that we

protect our soul's integrity from the invader, as far as others are concerned, while we suffer our own mind—and nothing can be more cruel than a person's own mind—to torment us with evil phantoms.

Against these phantoms, against this goblinish cruelty of the auto-sadistic demon in our own mind, the only defense is the power of forgetting.

For if our mind hath its own self-tormenting demon, it also hath its own pool of Lethe, deep and healing in its fathomless oblivion.

And if we have faith in our will to forget, greater and greater will grow our power of forgetting. In this power we must trust. In this power, however we are tormented, we must have faith. For the moments of ecstasy are so transporting, the level of unfevered happiness so high, which we attain by this isolation of the self, that we must be prepared to pay the penalty of such a privilege.

And the penalty of this privilege is that we have often to move consciously and deliberately along the slippery edge of madness.

Throw overboard all the gregarious conventions; throw overboard all the rivalries and ambitions; present the impenetrableness of a stone to human intruders, of a hard round stone to the intrusions of pain, there will still be left these phantoms of the mind to

be constantly and deliberately forgotten.

But since this may well be our one conscious life between two incredible eternities, and since no mortal may live without taking heavy odds and grievous risks, it seems better to trust in our power of forgetting these images of insanity than to live cheek by jowl with such dusty companions as Conformity, Ennui and Futility.

It must always be remembered that the isolation of the self, in a deliberately lonely life, need not imply living in actual solitude.

What it does imply is the choice of a contemplative life over every other; but a contemplative life that can be lived under almost every conceivable condition.

A person can be a soldier, a sailor, a school-master, a revolutionary agitator, a farmer, a factory-hand; a person can be any kind of working-woman, or domestic woman, and live in profound loneliness.

But though a contemplative life is possible in connection with any kind of job, a passion for money-making, by reason of its needing so much concentration, tends to render such a life difficult.

It is unquestionable that many material advantages have been attained by the gregariousness of the human race but it is also certain that if our ancestors had lived more lonely lives various deep secrets of ex-

istence would now have been revealed that have not been revealed.

One aspect, in particular, of earth-life, might be mentioned in passing, as an example of the kind of planetary secret which our ancestors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—yes! and earlier than that—habitually neglected. I refer to what might be called the "expectancy-mood" of Nature. This is a most characteristic mood of the Cosmos, and one which cannot be caught save in complete solitude.

City-born, or country-born, almost every child of our race can, if he is patient enough and seeks some solitary path under the wide heaven, enter into this mystery.

For it seems to be a recurrent aspect of the universe, this curious "waiting-mood," this hushed and muted inbreathing, this tense expectancy.

Not only among the tall pines on the desolate mountain-ledges, not only among the drooping willows by the unfrequented streams, but wherever there is a patch of moss or a blade of grass, if you catch the earth-life in an unguarded hour, you find it waiting for something. Who has not stumbled upon some lonely pond hidden away among the hills and caught this mood in its pure arrest?

The tall rushes reflected in the water, the languidly



floating newts suspended below the surface, and above all the great green-headed motionless frogs with their brown mud-coloured backs carrying upon them the quivering line between air and water as they rest in their terraqueous quiescence, like amphibious saurians of the primeval aeons—all these things endow such a spot with a patient expectancy that renders your human presence there a vulgar sight-seeing invasion of some age-old vigil whose far-off hope has been half-forgotten in the interminable ages.

Even in the heart of the most clamorous city there are fragments and vestiges of this mysterious, primordial earth-mood, so neglected by our social-minded generation.

From the smoke-blackened trunks of stunted city trees, from the withered patches of pitiful city grass, arise vague intimations of this strange expectancy of all planetary life!

It is as if rocks and stones and recurrent vegetation held some secret denied to animals and birds and man; the very earth-mould, the very sea-sand waiting there, in dumb sub-conscious brooding, for some vast, catastrophic event.

You may call this an illusion; you may say that if there were such a secret it would be revealed rather to the cooperative labours of social-minded men of

science than to the lonely ponderings of obscure and anti-social contemplation; but how few of these gregarious seekers seem able to catch the processes of Nature with that physiognomic eye that Spengler praises so highly in the case of Goethe!

But meanwhile, letting the fashions of the hour flourish and fade, the isolated ego, self-created in its solitude, moves through the world, waiting upon the spirit, communing with the elements, self-poised and patient in its hushed passivity.

Egoism if you will! But there is a humility too about this isolated self that often puts the fussy self-assertion of the warm-blooded crowd to shame. What it holds precious for itself, it holds precious for others also. Listening in silence to the silences of the universe it is unwilling to disturb the memory-essences of other human selves. The faintest, filmiest, most tenuous stirrings of their identity, are sacred to it. Habituated to waiting upon the hushed planetary vigil, no individual tragedy fails to touch it. Every organism that breathes the air affects it, and in its place and measure all that lives cries out to it. Thus for the isolated self there wells up from the depths of the universe a mysterious humility, more natural than the humility of the crowd. The humility of the crowd is boisterous, unctuous, self-righteous. But the soul that has re-created

itself in isolation has gained something of the humility of the grass, the rocks, the winds. All that lives is holy unto it; and it realizes, taught by the innumerable voices of Nature, a certain ultimate equality in everything that draws breath.

## THE SELF REALIZED

THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES . . . A FRESH START . . . THE ART OF  
A SOLITARY LIFE . . . OUR LIFE-ILLUSION . . . OURSELVES AND  
THE PAST . . . A NEW BIRTH . . . "PREMEDITATED ECSTASY" . . .

THE WILL TO HAPPINESS . . . AN EXAMPLE

To BE possessed of a philosophy of its own, the lonely self must detach itself from all philosophical systems, both old and new, but it need not dogmatically reject any of these.

They will always remain there, these slowly-evolved accumulations of thought and feeling. They will always be at hand for the liberated ego to take what lends itself to its own nature, from all these great intellectual and emotional deposits; but henceforth, after this one clear act of detachment, it is no longer committed to any of them by the insidious hypnosis of custom. It is free. It is removed a certain distance from all and it is critical of all.

What it takes to itself it will use with a certain sceptical aloofness, this from one traditional system, that from another, while all the time, in uncommitted

isolation, it will turn upon its own axis in its own unique orbit.

Between the great human philosophies, held and affirmed by rational assent, and the bitter hour-to-hour struggle of our identity with what impedes and hinders it, there is a great gap.

Ask a man what he believes—what his views are about God and Immortality, Good and Evil, all the First and Last Things—and you will see him pause for a second, drop his contact with the real caress and the real stab of his immediate sensations, turn from the hurt and the balm of his passing thoughts, and proceed to fling his consciousness upon some vague, remote, hypothetical theory, a theory or a dogma, drawn from custom, with hardly a tincture or twist given it by his own desire or by his own proud denial of his desire.

But the only authentic philosophy which the self possesses is its habitual way of taking real life, of dealing in fact with the actual hurt or balm of its immediate feelings, with the actual caresses or cruel stabs of its skin-to-skin experiences.

Philosophy that offers hopeful or pessimistic opinions about the general scope of things without dealing directly and intimately with the pricks and stings and

bites, the solaces and anodynes of our daily experience, is not worthy of its great name.

A man's philosophy, a woman's philosophy, is the conscious habit of thought by which the self gathers itself together, cleanses itself, governs itself, steers itself; and copes as well as it may with all the pleasant or unpleasant impacts of the vast impinging Not-self.

It is not that all the drift and flotsam of the great historic religious and metaphysical systems that float around its path are meaningless to an intelligence thus working out its own philosophy. They supply it with continual tests and comparisons as to the practical value of its own habitual ways of going to work.

Such a soul, hardening, moulding, clarifying, tightening its own reactions to the mystery of life may well challenge itself and shock itself into sturdier resilience by a consideration of these historic attitudes.

What, for example, in its intimate experience of soothing and distressing feelings, has it found for itself that corresponds to the old human tradition about God? What is its personal substitute for traditional morality? What has it found for itself that corresponds to the great, seductive, disturbing, stimulating systems of Plato, Spinoza, Hegel, Nietzsche? What is there in its disciplined self-created reactions to the mystery of Good and Evil that corresponds to

the "logoi" of Christ, to the impassioned psychology of St. Paul, to the oracles of Laotze, of Buddha, of Heraclitus?

But let us not be deceived. These are not essential questions. All these inspirations and imperatives have so mingled with the stream of human consciousness that the air is full of them, and only the scholastic searcher after historic origins need concern himself as to what is Heathen or Christian, Mediaeval or Classical, Occidental or Oriental, in these "streams of tendency" making for the wisdom of life.

No! these are not essential questions. It matters little whether some deep psychic secret of which you have luckily possessed yourself ought to be attributed to Plato, or Goethe, or Wordsworth, or Dostoievsky, or the Tao, or the wisdom of Zoroaster, or the doctrine of the Stoics. All the philosophers, all the prophets, draw their secrets from the same sort of fountain—that is to say from the solitary contemplations of their own lonely, anti-social ego, feeling its way by itself amid the smarting blows and the thrilling caresses of intimate personal experience.

There are indeed hints enough in the Gospels themselves that the historic Jesus found it necessary to withdraw into absolute solitude, before He could at-

tain his full revelation as to the mystic link between the Son of Man and the Father of men.

The attitude of the self, that has fallen back on its own integrity, in regard to all these great historic cults, is of little importance, as long as it obstinately refuses to be finally committed to any single one of them!

The air we breathe is full of the aroma of these traditions, full of the fragrance of these ancient Mysteries. The very pulse-beats of our bodies are tangible to us through a psychic atmosphere, charged with the voices of all the saints from Pythagoras to the little Thérèse of Lisieux.

When we fancy we are making a desperate struggle to break away from traditional opinions and sink down into the interior voice of our own soul, when we imagine we are turning away from Christianity, from Buddhism, from Stoicism, it is on the authority of countless mystic sayings of Christ, of Buddha, of Plato, of Epictetus, that we shake off the orthodoxies founded on their names.

And just as we are so closely surrounded by the impalpable aura of the old philosophies that it is impossible to think at all without using their floating essences, so are we surrounded by the projected images



of the innumerable Divine Beings that our race has invented for its worship.

These images, visualized by poets, by soothsayers, by prophets, made palpable by the credulous faith of many generations, have still—even the most faded and phantasmal among them—a seductive influence, an insidious attraction, that has been created by mankind itself.

There is a rebellion against all metaphysical systems that is naive and stupid. There is a denial of the existence of Supernatural Beings which is not only naive and stupid, but malicious, arrogant, bigoted.

Life is deeper, stranger, more insubstantial than our reason allows.

The truth is that the more resolutely we harden our souls in loneliness the more vividly do we grow aware of a cloud of other "souls," natural and supernatural, hovering about us. This is a paradox; but like all other paradoxes it is the truest expression of reality that we can reach.

The social-minded human being is the one of all others least aware of the subtle complicated charm of human personality. It needs a passionate loneliness—whether practised in company or alone—to give us the real clue to the mystery of one single human being.

Gregariousness and a mania for society drag down,

cheapen, vulgarize, degrade, the delicate and sensitive dignity of human life. And the same paradox applies to what might be called the "crowd-metaphysic" mind, and to the "crowd-god" mind.

The solitary ego can derive from the philosophy of Hegel, let us say, or of Schopenhauer or of Nietzsche, a thrilling inspiration such as students or teachers, engaged in sociable and communal study, can never hope to attain.

It is not those who are familiarly "at ease in Zion" to whom is revealed the airy and imponderable essence, the mystic myrrh, the ravishing cassia, that can be found in the "dulce lumen, dulce numen," of the intimate religious cults.

And in Science itself it is the same. From the solitary attic and lonely laboratory come the discoveries that disclose the secrets of Nature.

The self that has pruned itself of all external props, the self that goes to and fro in a silence that can be breathed like air, in a solitude that can be tasted like water, will be found to treat every human theory with impenetrable scepticism. It will know that it is unthinkable that any system of rational logic should contain more than the faintest clue to the purpose of the Cosmos.

To such a self all these great systems of thought are

like so many individual works of art. It will feel itself surrounded by these systems, as if they were so many invisible trees, full of lovely scented blossoms; blossoms from which the soul can drink the heady perfumes without pausing upon its airy journey, without pitching its tent, however fair the oasis!

The hour has arrived for men and women to shake themselves free from the old traditional catch-words that have lost their life-sap.

The hour has arrived for a completely fresh start in our race's emotional life. Towards this fresh start, this new birth, we can freely move, not fearing lest anything of the old up-gathered, slowly-accumulated wisdom will be lost, for the very air we breathe is impregnated with it and we ourselves are made of its floating substance. But though we breathe these diffused airs of our race's past, though our inmost chemistry is composed of their psychic precipitations—forward, forward must we move; our thoughts, our feelings, our habits, roused to confederacy in a new birth of the imaginative will!

The mistake we make is to turn upon our past with angry wholesale negation. There is no way of really freeing ourselves from these old opinions—grown so stale, so sterile, so sapless—save by appropriating to ourselves the fading magic of their symbols as we move

on to new life. The total suppression of an ancient cult, of an outworn morale, of an entrenched and lifeless mythology, only intensifies all manner of secret reactions in its favour. The way of wisdom is to treat it airily, lightly, wantonly, and in a spirit of poetry; and above all to use its symbols, which are its spiritual essence, giving them a new connotation, a fresh meaning.

What we need, what we must create for ourselves, is a "philosophy of representation." By this I mean that we need to create substitutes for all the spiritual satisfactions that the old mythologies gave us.

For, after all, these things were not invented—as some grossly aver—or thrust down the unwilling throat of humanity by crafty conjurers. They are what they are because humanity found comfort in them, expressing its good, and very often its evil, in them, and giving life a certain dignity, a certain ritualistic heightening, by their means. Freely they sprang up, wild, terrible, hideous, beautiful growths, in the bosom of humanity, just as humanity itself sprang up in the bosom of Nature.

If their life-sap has fled, this only means that we must find substitutes for them. And the hour has come for such a venture. The hour has come for so simplifying the order of our days that once more

the magic of the universe—poisoned by the decomposition of these drifting life-husks from which the spirit has fled—may flow through us, renewing our hearts and reviving our sluggish wills.

These old religious cults, these old metaphysical systems, were desperate attempts to wrest its secret from the universe. They were concerned with the question—is there, or is there not, a conscious purpose in the cosmos; is there, or is there not, a survival of the soul after death?

Our re-birth of interest in life will be found, I think, to lay less stress upon these questions than our fathers did. This does not mean that we are less spiritual than our fathers were. It means that these matters are so difficult of solution that the emotional agitation about them troubled, clouded, obscured those primeval simplicities of life in which alone permanent happiness is found.

Let these questions go! It is impossible to prove anything in reply to them; whether positively or negatively.

In spite of what Miguel Unamuno says, we can live happily without knowing whether there is a God; we can live worthily without knowing whether we survive death. Why torment ourselves any further then by going round and round in this tread-mill circle?

The better way is to find a substitute for God, a substitute for Immortality. For this refusal to waste our precious hours in kicking against the pricks does not mean that the satisfaction our fathers got from these things can be supplied in no other way.

Just as it has become a distracting weariness to torment ourselves with these questions, so it has become a narrow-minded stupidity to treat them as if settled once for all in a gloomy negative.

They are not settled—positively or negatively—and in the nature of the case never can be; so that the wise course is to note their presence in our mental landscape like vast wide-stretching Myth-trees; and then to move forward, resolute in our purpose to wrest from life some sort of correspondency to—or substitute for—the inspiration they gave our fathers.

It is, I think, a matter of common experience that the most inexpressible ecstasies that come to us—those vague transports of melting happiness that appear and disappear so mysteriously—take upon themselves, in our awareness of them, something that is unmistakably religious.

And when we seek to analyze exactly what this “religious” element is that enters into these simple transports, I think we would most of us confess that it has to do with what we usually call reconciliation; in other

words, with some vague sense that the atrocious and unspeakable horrors that occur in life are resolved into some kind of ultimate, intelligible meaning. Now it was as supplying an intelligible meaning to these unutterable horrors, such as at least cross the path of most human beings, that what our ancestors meant by God and Immortality proved so valuable.

In those mysterious transports of happiness which most normal people experience there is, I think, an obscure residuum, or deposit, of these old religious ideas of restitution and reconciliation; and, if this is the case, it seems a grievous mistake to just turn our backs upon God and Immortality rather than to dig deeper and deeper, in this holy ground of our happiness, until we find some substitute for them.

Religion has always been double-edged. In one aspect it has been the most sociable of influences; in another the most solitary; and what is advisable for us now is to cultivate some definite substitute for the lives of hermits and hermit-saints.

Sociableness murders solitude. Society—even the society of nice people—brings in its train all that fretting, chafing, tantalizing, teasing flock of worrying thoughts which destroy the dignity and beauty of life much quicker than any lonely vice.

Humanity has reached a point in the evolution of our race when we know for certain that it is a simple life and a simple life alone that brings to human beings that desirable condition known as happiness. We have reached a point where the fallacy has been exposed that the increase of social intercourse and the apparatus of social pleasure does anything but murder real happiness.

The gulf between being happy and being unhappy is one of the greatest gulfs that exist in the world. The difference is appalling; the contrast is shocking. One feels sometimes that there must be some sort of fatal insanity in human character that drives us on to hug to ourselves the very things that kill our joy, the very thoughts that murder our peace, the very strivings and competings that poison the fountain of our life.

We are so made that the more addicted to real happiness we grow the more we seek solitude. It is the sign of a nature that is not really intellectual—though it may be as clever as you please—when at every chance it plunges into society.

Intellectual people may be forced to give up their loneliness for the sake of love or of lust—that is altogether a different matter, and when you come to analyze it to the bottom both love and lust are profoundly lonely—but they will never give up their loneliness for



the mere herd-pleasure of feeling warm and cheerful and friendly and spiteful.

Intellectual people are not rare. There are a great many of them. Most families contain at least one such. An intellectual person is a person who has the genius to grasp the fact that it is a curious experience to be alive; so curious in fact that it is madness not to sacrifice everything to get the full taste of it!

A well-managed solitary life, whether surrounded by people or protected from people, is a very delicate and a very difficult work of art.

Routine plays the leading part. Men and women who do not insist on routine in their lives are sick or mad. Without routine all is lost. Just as without some kind of rhythm all is lost in poetry. For routine is man's art of copying the art of Nature. In Nature all is routine. The seasons follow one another in sacred order; the seed ripens, the leaf expands, the blossom and the fruit follow, and then comes the fall.

Routine is the rhythm of the universe. By routine the harvests are reaped, by routine the tides rise and ebb; by routine the Constellations march in their sublime order across the sky. The feel of routine is the feel of the mystery of creation. In the uttermost abysses of life it holds sway. Beautiful and tragic is its systole and diastole. Without routine there can be no happi-

ness; for there can be no endurance, no expectation, no security, no peace, no old or new, no past or future, no memory and no hope.

But after routine has been attained the most important achievement in the art of a solitary life is having the right thoughts, that is to say having thoughts that give you a calm happiness, in place of thoughts that prick you and sting you and bite you and corrode you!

It is astonishing to think how long humanity has existed, and yet how little we have advanced in gaining control over our thoughts. To control your thoughts—that is the most important thing you can do; far more important than to control your children or your food or your drink or your wife or your husband or your business or your work or your reputation. He who can control his thoughts is at the key-position of the Cosmos. He has the clue, the secret password. Down into the depths of the sea he can dive and find pearls and coral and drowned gold. Over the grassy prairies he can follow the wind till he feels as if he were clutching the rim of the horizon with his crooked fingers.

Here indeed we approach the bed-rock advantage of this planetary elementalism. Once free from the

tyranny of annoying thoughts we can enjoy without let or hindrance the sensation of what I call the life-illusion.

A person's life-illusion is that secret dramatic way of regarding himself which makes him feel to himself a remarkable, singular, unusual, exciting individual. Everyone has a life-illusion; and it is something that goes much deeper than mere vanity or conceit.

A life-illusion is never wholly untrue. It is a vaporous eidolon of yourself that walks about with you wherever you go. It is a shadow. And because it is a shadow it has truth. But it is not a shadow of your objective self;—that dressed-up popinjay or scarecrow that your neighbors catch sight of before you open your mouth;—it is the shadow of your subjective self; the shadow of that etheric mask of the abysmal thing-in-itself, which has been created by your mind. The inmost "I am I" is the thing-in-itself; and this creates the etheric self, whose shadow is the life-illusion.

For example, imagine a hard-working, humble, loyal, moral, simple worker in a shop or a store. This man's actual appearance is quiet, unassuming, unobtrusive. You win his confidence. You set him at his ease. And suddenly—if you are a woman—he begins to talk as freely as he does when he is alone with his daily companion: his wife or sister or mother.

And you discover to your astonishment that this worthy fellow is to himself a regular Iago of downright, sardonic, cynical, brutal "honesty." He is not one to beat about the bush. He is not one to sentimentalize over things. If you come to him—but who, of course, is he? A Nobody, just a Nobody!—you won't get any propitiatory nonsense. You'll get the take-it-or-leave-it "truth." And yet how far from all this is the world's idea of this patient man!

Now a person's life-illusion will not appear at all at first sight. The chances are that it will totally contradict his physical appearance. The chances are that in the nervousness of politeness, or in the relaxation of geniality, or in the shock of excitement, he will fall back upon his real nature; which will show itself to be a much more subtle, and probably a much more civilized thing, than his life-illusion about himself.

Women would not be the adepts they are both at flattering men's life-illusions and at stabbing them with bodkin-thrusts of a miraculous cruelty if they were not merciless critics of these subjective masquerades . . . and heroic protectors too . . . in deep and terrible intuition.

Strangers who visit some *ménage-à-deux* all unexpectedly are often shocked at the way the woman will tear to pieces, as if for their special entertainment,

every shred of dignity in her mate. Ah! you do not know the secrets of these people's hearts! She will deride and mock her man's real character to her heart's content. He minds this no more than a pig minds scratching, or a trout minds tickling. But to his life-illusion she will preserve an inscrutable, mysterious, and hieratic reverence.

And the life-illusions of all "Elementalists"—if I may use this term for these lovers of the Inanimate—have much in common.

With most human beings, when their feeling for themselves as irresistible Don Juans, or as adventurous desperadoes, or as encyclopedic and learned scholars, or as saintly moralists, or as sad, austere persons who have suffered much and are no longer fooled by life, is broken down, there is nothing left. A horrid chasm yawns. The person's ego feels torn to bits and as if each fragment of it were sinking down into that chasm with a wail of desolation.

But with any lonely spirit inured to the habit of life which might be called Elementalism, the life-illusion is independent of human valuation. What, in fact, does such an ego feel about itself in a manner parallel to what in others is this dramatic heightening? Upon what secret pride does it lie back under the pressure of hostile circumstance?

Of one thing we may be sure. It retreats into a feeling of its identity so remote from that sort of pomposity whose touchiness is a secret irritation to any companion, that a woman, if its companion be a woman, need resort to no ritual of propitiation to keep it in a good temper. It is indeed in this remoteness of its life-illusion from any ordinary dramatic pride that an Elementalist becomes so easy a companion.

To his own secret consciousness he is a lonely fighter among the planetary silences, so preoccupied with the effort of retaining a rigid self-control, as far as human irritations are concerned, and a porous receptivity, as far as the larger aspects of the cosmos are concerned, that he is prepared at any moment to bend, to bow, to yield; to become like floating vapour or flowing water in his dealing with his fellows.

The mad scramble to be heard of by the crowd, to be acclaimed by the crowd, tends to completely overwhelm in our bewildered minds our longing to be great in ourselves, whether anyone hears of it or not. In fact we have almost ceased—in giving up the aristocratic tradition—even to know in what individual greatness consists.

The mind that can shake itself free from its human preoccupations is not a mind that has betrayed its

human engendering; it is a mind that has gathered up the historic continuity of the generations; it is a mind that is aware of what Job endured, of what Homer enjoyed, of what Sophocles experienced, of what Goethe felt.

We are so made that it gives us a calm, deep, rich pleasure to think of the long romance of human life upon earth, the rolling by of so many centuries, the qualities of so many strange civilizations, the glamour of Greece, the terrible dignity of Rome, and the wild fantastic Passion-Dance of the Middle Ages! But most of all does it give us a strangely satisfying sense of the dim and fathomless richness of life when we brood upon the cults of the old religions or upon the great metaphysical systems.

As we work in our bustling offices, as we hurry to and fro through our crowded streets, as we pass from factory to factory, from market to market, from editor to editor, from employer to employer, paying back in drudgery and the loss of leisure what we owe to our race for our conception and protection, it is a sort of comfort to remember that there is such a thing in our world at all as Metaphysics.

Call to mind the large, luminous outlines—or, for the matter of that, the sweet, thick, gnostic no-outlines—full of a fatality that is a fairy-tale fatality, quite

different from the grim pressure of real fate, of these old metaphysical interpretations. How soothingly different from the bitter realities of the world they are!

And yet it thickens out the background of our thoughts to feel them there, as we go forward with our drudgery, even as in some mellow picture of Hobbema or of Ruysdael the labourer returns to his hut, or leaves his hut, down a long avenue of noble trees. He may scarce notice them, these trees, as we scarce give a thought to these old philosophical systems; but there, along the road of our wayfaring, they still stand; some of them quite dead, some of them still putting forth little leafy sprouts on their withered branches, but all of them gathering the mists and sun-flickerings about them, all of them making some kind of plaintive noise in the secular gusts of the world-wind.

But the hour is at hand for a fresh out-growth of the human spirit, for a new birth of the human soul. Such a newly planted seedling of the mind will of necessity appear to contemporary eyes insignificant and negligible as it hardly rises above the tall grass at the end of the Myth-Tree avenue.

But how necessary to the coming generations that this avenue of the spirit should continue; that such a



new life-tree should grow up freely and spontaneously—and yet with a certain humility—to mitigate a little the bleak airs of Space and to soften the far-drawn moans of Time!

Thus did the Christian Religion itself sprout up, when the fresh dews of a simpler benediction fell, night by night, amid the broken arches and ruined pilasters, of the temples of the older gods. The heart of the world can only renew itself in the lonely lives of individuals. All fresh leapings up of the spiritual sap in human beings imply a simplification of their daily habits. Every cult has its dominant clue-gesture; and the dominant clue-gesture of the “*vita nuova*” described here might be expressed in the term *premeditated ecstasy*, an erotic embrace of the not-self by the self.

This description will strike many minds as a humorous paradox, and it requires a little explanation; but when one calls to mind the psychic concentration, practised in many epochs and in many lands throughout the history of our race, with the definite end in view of attaining a certain spiritual mood, it will perhaps seem less fantastic.

In all lives there is a constant stream of self-consciousness; the person thinking to himself:—“Well! here am I, and how difficult my life is!” or on the

contrary:— "Well! here am I, and how nicely I am getting on!" This feeling of self-awareness is often interrupted by the tension of work, or the tension of society; but even in the midst of work, even in the midst of society it is constantly coming back, and it always comes back when the work is over and there is a moment of relaxation.

Even while we are talking to someone, and bestirring ourselves quite actively we feel this self-awareness. And what does it precisely consist of? Glance at the stream of thought passing through you at this minute. Much of it—when you have pushed pressing tasks or your immediate struggle aside—is still preoccupation with money-worries and practical worries. But push these aside too! Then begin our poor mortality's emotional preoccupations. He doesn't love me. She is unfaithful to me. They are solely thinking of themselves in their treatment of me. Oh how mistaken I was in him! Oh what a fool I was when I first made love to such a person!

Well! Get rid of all this from your mind; and with it get rid of all your personal rivalries, ambitions, superiorities, distinctions.

What is left?

A few, sad, wistful, bitter, desperate, irritable anxieties about people you are fond of.

Cut that out too. And now what is left?

"Nothing . . . simply nothing . . . my mind was a perfect blank when you spoke to me."

But you were staring at the side of the door.

"Was I? Yes! That is so. I was fascinated by the way that curious light falls just there. I was wondering to myself what it made me think of . . . something very long ago."

Yes! That "Nothing" which you spoke of, as the only thing left, turns out to be that Hegelian "Not-Being" which is the same as "Being." Extract the essence of these two things—your blank mind and the light on the side of the door—and you get that mysterious Becoming, in other words the self encountering the not-self, which if it is not the Absolute is as near to that mystery as we are ever likely to come.

But we are approaching the heart of the matter now.

Aware of yourself as the living ego of all that "long ago" of which you spoke, you glance at that curious light on the door and think to yourself:—"Here am I, alive still, enjoying myself looking at that light on the door!"

Now does it begin to grow clear what I meant by "premeditated ecstasy"? Why is it that the Celebration of Mass has such an overpowering influence upon hu-

man beings, whether Catholic or Non-Catholic? Because in the Ritual of the Mass this same ultimate mystery of the embrace of the Not-Self by the Self is summed up and consecrated.

If a boy or girl, who has had little or no education, came to me and said:— "You keep talking of some new uplift of the human spirit in these confused and unhappy days; and you seem to make it consist in some mental attitude that is hard for me to follow. What exactly have you in your mind that I should do?"—how should I answer such a question?

I should reply to such an one:— "Sink into your soul. Say to yourself:— 'Here am I, a living, conscious self, surrounded by walls, streets, pavements, houses and roofs. Above me is the boundless sky, beneath me the solid earth. All around me are people of my own kind with their fixed ideas and their fixed habits. Out of my loneliness I stretch forth my spirit towards these inanimate things which the others are passing carelessly by, and taking casually for granted, towards these stones, towards this dust, towards this brick-work and iron-work and woodwork, on which the sun or the moon is shining, upon which the rain is falling, or the clouds rolling, or the mist sinking down. I am in a hospital, in a prison, in a mad-house and it is the same thing! I stretch out my spirit to these walls,

to that window, to that square of blueness, of yellowness, of greyness, of blackness, which is the window of this place. These inanimate substances, this inanimate space, this air, this light, this darkness is my universe, the world into which I—this living self—have been flung by an inscrutable destiny. It is in my power to gather up my forces and embrace this universe, represented by these material elements about me. It is in my power to assert my nature, my inmost being, against these things, upon these things. It is in my power to satisfy my senses upon them and to feel, as I stretch out my spirit towards them, that I am embracing, and yet defying, the whole material world! As I do this, it matters nothing how ignorant I am of the great religions, the great philosophies, the great prophets and sages of my race. Here am I—the “I am I” within this weak, feeble, wretched, discomforted body—stretching out my spirit to the great mystery of the universe as represented by these queer objects, these stones, this wood-work, this dark night, these gusts of rainy wind.’” ,

Whether these simple words convey or do not convey to the boy or girl in question the sort of attitude I have in mind, what I would like to add to them would be a renewed emphasis upon the importance of

loneliness. Only in loneliness does the essential mystery of the substance of matter reveal itself.

These walls, or these half-open windows, through which the yellow sun or the dark night appears, are the fringes, edges, margins of an unfathomable universe, on the brink of which we stand, while our soul grapples with the Unknown.

Does it begin to make itself clear what I am seeking to express by the phrase "premeditated ecstasy"?

By a certain deliberate concentration the mind can gather together within itself what might be called the "machinery of the ecstasy-release."

For in those thrilling moments to which reference has been made, a quite definite re-arrangement of the forces of our being takes place, that both responds to, and half-creates these waves of happiness. This arrangement of the machinery of our mind can be brought about by our will in a manner that surpasses expectation. The willing towards this ecstasy does much in itself, even if the desired consummation never comes, to enrich and heighten our interior life.

And when you really face the situation, the elements that compose it are very simple. There is the happiness—a great mysterious reservoir of it—awaiting you in Nature. There is your mind's machinery, dedicated to the capture, reception, and storing up of this happi-

ness. It only needs the force of a resolute will-power to set this machinery at work; its magnetic wires steadily directed towards this reservoir of happiness whose existence it feels in the air around it, and whose waters it can draw into itself.

The truth is that if life is to renew itself, from its central fount, in the souls of vast numbers of human beings, it must be through the personal will of these individuals themselves that this miracle takes place. And it can only take place as an integral part of our life-philosophy. It cannot be snatched at out of chaos upon any wild casual desperate impulse. If we really cared about possessing ourselves of this magical secret of inward happiness we would direct all our energies towards it.

One of the reasons why we do not attain it is a reason of ghastly simplicity. We do not desire it. We desire desperately certain external forms of pleasure. We desire power, glory, money, health, reputation. But not happiness!

This is an unquestionable fact. If a successful well-to-do man, the miserable emptiness of whose joyless and banal existence is manifest in the expression of his countenance, were to contemplate the life of some solitary day-labourer, in whose calm eyes this particu-

lar happiness reigned supreme, what would he feel? Envy of this person's spiritual peace? Desire to share the man's magical serenity? Never for a moment! He would pity the poor devil. He would think to himself: "There, save for my superior cleverness, should I be going about!"

The truth is, our modern crowd-consciousness has so vulgarized, so cheapened, so blighted, so perverted, so eclipsed the natural dignity of our nature that we would far rather make no effort of the will to be happy than to make it! To make a spiritual effort, to make a moral effort, to make a mental effort—all these efforts seem worse to us than just drifting on and clutching at the miserable pleasures and distractions that Society throws in our way. These accursed "efforts" seem like the struggles of a drug-addict to give up his drug, or of a confirmed alcoholic to stop drinking.

And our crowd-consciousness will make use of its "humour" here—that "humour" with which it is forever trying to waylay and prevent all spiritual experiments—and with this "humour" it will make sport of the recluse for his attempt to be different from itself.

If the sort of new life-cult, the coming of which I am audacious enough to prophecy, did ever spread from individual to individual throughout our western



nations, it is calculated to arouse the same bewildered hostility that Christianity did.

That it will not arouse this feeling will be solely due to the fact that, unlike Christianity, it will not hesitate to deceive the crowd-consciousness as to its huge departures from it.

This new life-cult will make everything depend upon the workings of the mind. It will in fact be a religion of the mind; and it will be possessed of a sort of secular "Mass"; not, in any sense, a Black Mass, but what might rather be called a Green Mass, the culminating gesture of which is a deliberate, intentional, premeditated ecstasy.

It will now begin to grow clear why, in my reply to the questions of my imaginary school-boy or school-girl, I limited myself to such extremely cold, bare, stark, unappealing examples of inanimate surroundings, rather than introducing country scenes and country objects.

This was done in order to show that it is possible for the mind to gather itself together and to renew itself, and to enrich itself from its storehouse of memories, when it is surrounded by the walls and pavements of the most modernized city.

But you will say:— "Is it not a crude, stark, bald, over-simplified life-cult, to lay all the stress thus sim-

ply and solely upon the mind's power of forcing itself to be happy?"

Yes! It is a stark and extremely simple life-doctrine. But the proof of it lies in how it works; in what it is good for. The proof of it lies in the unfathomable depths of the ecstasy that it invokes. And that it is simple and stark is entirely in its favour.

It is precisely here that all the great religions, except perhaps Mohammedanism, fail us in some way, fail something in us that craves for the direct, the concrete, the tangible, the emphatically simple, among these great spiritual symbols. And it goes down to the bottom of things!

A man is in prison, say, in the midst of a vast city, or in a mad-house. There are horrors not far from him; and, maybe, sounds and sights within his reach, which will not bear thinking on.

Men are such monsters to men that no happiness is possible without a definite and premeditated forgetting of what they are always doing to one another. There is little danger that lonely, sensitive people will become callous to such things. Even a great reformer, like Lord Shaftesbury, must have had to forget *some* things in order to live to do what he did for the tor-

tured victims of industrial greed; and the same applies to those among us who follow his steps.

But if my prisoner has this complete command over his mind which is the whole secret of life's mastery he can forget the things around him and stand, or lean, or sit, or lie, staring in a trance at one single fragment of the window-sill.

We will assume—to make this lonely one's need of philosophy as desperate as may be—that his window opens to the north and that there is no yellow sunlight falling upon the sill. We will assume—if you please—that it is spasmodically raining and that there is a gusty wind tossing dead leaves and a few straws before it as it blows the rain-drops against the pane.

Now what actually might be the process by which the solitary man in this prison, this hospital, this mad-house, manages the machinery of his mind so that he can get an ecstasy even while he knows that there are unthinkable things going on around him?

It seems to me that the first thing such a person turns his mind to is the chance of his having acquired consciousness at all! How extraordinary, how never to be taken for granted, is the fact that in a universe—so full, as far as he knows, of so many inanimate things, and of so many things that, though animate, possess levels of consciousness apparently very differ-

ent from our own—he should be saying so clearly to himself:— “Here am I, a living, conscious entity, in the midst of all this!”

Having realized the miracle of his being what he is—a conscious self in this bleak place—the next thing he does is to ponder on the inevitability of death.

He is alive now, he is conscious now; but in a given time, short or long as it may happen, he will be as unconscious as the woodwork of this melancholy window, the withered leaves blown across it, as the rain-drops streaming down it.

If he is utterly miserable, in pain of mind and body, he may well feel that it would be a comfort to be dead, to be out of the whole struggle and at peace. But meanwhile? Surely meanwhile—before it is too late—why not try the experiment of changing everything for himself—as an inward instinct tells him he can do—by that interior motion of his mind which has come to be called “using the will.”

Why make this effort at all? Why? Simply because as things are he is miserable and by such an interior act—though he may not at once become happy—he can at least become active, and that without lifting a finger; active instead of passive, strung up and defiant instead of relaxed and helpless.

I have seen a wounded kitten gather itself together

to die with a dignity and decency worthy of the death of Caesar.

This is the whole secret.

In the act of defiance itself, in the act of gathering together the forces of his soul, in the act of saying to the universe:—"Thou hast not got me down yet, O World!" there is incredible comfort and relief.

"I shall be dead," the self cries fiercely to itself, "before so very long. But while I am alive why should I be so woefully unhappy? Why should I give fate, or chance, or mankind, or whatever it is, the evil satisfaction of seeing me broken and defeated?"

And so—from this vantage-ground of brittle life between the unknown and the unknown—the undefeated self flings itself upon the not-self, resolved to wrestle with this not-self, to embrace this not-self, to conquer, to enjoy this not-self.

What weapons does it use for this purpose? Its five senses! It embraces the not-self by touch, by taste, by smell, by sight, by hearing.

But perhaps fate—or other men—strike it into numbness, into blindness, into deafness; killing one or more of these precious senses. Well! In its blindness it can still hear. In its deafness it can still see.

But suppose—in this mad-house or this hospital—all its senses are murdered.

Well then! In its complete isolation, stripped of all its antennae of contact, it is still itself. Nothing can prevent it saying to itself "I am I," nothing can prevent it thinking its defiance, nothing can prevent it remembering, expecting. It has become like a stone on the river-bank, like a pebble on the seashore, like a stricken but yet living tree by the wayside.

But even in this naked isolation the self retains the power of setting in order the machinery of its mind. It retains the power of adjusting this machinery to that interior attitude which is the attitude directed towards happiness, the attitude directed towards what I have called "premeditated ecstasy."

Nothing that any power can do can so murder the senses, while a man lives, that he loses the distinction between self and not-self. At the worst—in a great numbness, blankness, darkness, paralysis—he is aware of his body, that intermediate not-self, and he is aware of a world beyond his body, the yet more objectively-remote not-self, and he is aware, if his plight be not unique in its desperation, of other minds, not so very far away, that resemble his own.

Undoubtedly fate *could* put you into so miserable a place that you would need to be a saint—indeed almost a god, certainly something much more than an ordinary human being—to find any fragment of "not-

self" there with which it would be possible to get into this religious relation.

But I have seen Negroes—those most religious characters of our race—who obviously were enjoying precisely and exactly the mystical rapture I am speaking of, whose business kept them all day in the gloomy purlieus of a station latrine. Something they had—some little personal possession upon a chair down there—the cover of a magazine, an old painted cigar-box with silver paper inside it, which served, when they fixed their attention upon it, the same purpose as was served by my northerly window in the madhouse, and the flying leaves that were blown upon that melancholy wind.

The sort of life-cult whose remote contours—like the edges of a cloud only just visible above the horizon—I am trying awkwardly to outline does not, as I have hinted, require any particular learning or any particular cleverness. A certain level of intellect it does require, but there's not a family in the land without some representative possessed of the sort of intellect of which I am thinking.

For, after all, around the consciousness of the simplest among us float, when we are alone, images, fragments, tokens, memories, half-symbols, broken echoes, of the great mystical thoughts of the world.

There is no need to belong to any organized religion to feel the spiritual impact of this procession of ancient thoughts, some withered and antiquated, some empty of all hope as the stalks of dead plants, but none of them wholly without a certain planetary pathos.

The old discarded Inspirations of our race! They who, by giving us their life's blood, enable us to pass beyond them and forget them!

Yes, the lonely spirit who has found this great "open secret" of a contemplative life; a life that is neither exactly religious nor exactly aesthetic, but containing a satisfaction for the soul beyond either of these, feels himself, in his struggle to attain this harmony between self and not-self, surrounded by many mysterious and sympathetic influences from the past. He is conscious of a curious comfort in the mere thought of these sympathies; and although ignorant, as he may well be, of what Heraclitus "says" or of what Laotze teaches, or of what Wordsworth fumblingly hints, he still feels that the more conscious he grows in his loneliness of this strange link of his with the unfathomable mystery of matter, the more he is aware of being supported and sustained in his struggle towards this mystical happiness by formidable influences out of the remote past.



## THE SELF AT BAY

OUTWITTING THE FIRST CAUSE...THE ETERNAL WIND...  
 THE ABSOLUTE...THE ETERNAL WORLD...FORGETTING...  
 THE ILLUSION OF POSSESSION...THE CALM OF CONTEM-  
 PLATION... "INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY"... THE  
 SELF AT BAY

BUT it is extraordinary how little help in the real difficulties of anyone's life the great philosophical systems are!

The real difficulties of our days have to do with bearing patiently, or defying heroically, or driving away by magic, the innumerable bodily and mental ills which persecute us and harass us and prevent the breath of life from flowing through us.

The real difficulties of our existence have to do with privation, poverty, sickness, nervous manias, passion and jealousy, hatred and malice, cruelty and brutality, boredom, self-indulgence, ambition, frivolity, and every kind of cold, hunger, dirt, exhaustion, insomnia and pain.

Now although Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer were not immune to these pinching and prod-

ding ills, no consideration of the spacious generalizations of such high philosophies helps us to deal with these devilish scrapings and scoopings and jarrings; with these bitter smarts and whoreson lethargies.

The Stoics taught something that serves our turn; and something can be sucked from the calm airs and quiet waftures of the old Epicurean sayings, as they filter down the ages. Isolated words, here and there, from the mysterious Personality of Jesus, carry strange and penetrating inspirations.

But all this, blending with the over-tones and under-tones of what remains alive in organized religion, valuable though it may be in intermitted moods, when the mind is in the vein to receive it, is not enough to keep our spiritual rigging taut and tense, to fill the sails of our creaking, groaning life-ship with a steadily blowing wind.

What we need most is something to break up the sluggishness, the weariness, the inertia, of the moments in our life that are our very own.

Necessity drives us in the matter of our daily toil. We have to live. And to live we have to work. The qualities that work demands such as endurance, patience, industry, energy, and a certain modicum of skill, are the same for all men and women. No one needs Plato to help him earn his living. No one needs

Epictetus, or Jesus either, to help him acquire energy, concentration, skill in his daily task.

Fear of destitution, of shocking privation, fear of the contempt of one's fellows, fear about the fate of child or parent or mate—these things are enough to keep a man hard at work, if he has normal instincts and feelings.

And it is lucky that it is so! The burden, the futility, the frivolous recklessness, the nervous manias, the hypochondriacal anxieties, the mad rush "to kill time," of people who are not driven by stark necessity to a life of constant toil, are not encouraging tokens as to what we would all do with ourselves if we had more time at our disposal.

Old-fashioned puritans blame these bored pleasure-hunters for committing sacrilege against Heaven. Communists blame them for betraying the Proletarian State. It seems that one might quarrel with these people on much more personal grounds. One might ask them point-blank whether they would prefer their orgies of riot, followed by reactions of infinite futility and disgust, to the experience of long ecstasies of happiness without any reaction at all.

They would no doubt toss such a protest to the devil in no uncertain tone; and would indicate, as the cynical heroes and heroines of modern fiction are always

indicating, that to a sophisticated mind, aware of the real horrors of human existence, it is better to be asleep than awake, drunk than sober, mad than sane, drugged than conscious, and dead than alive.

Fully and without any qualification we may admit these horrors. We may admit that there are things going on, at every moment, all over the world, that no one but an inspired saint or an insane sadist can bear to think upon for more than a passing second.

Deep in the natures of these sophisticated time-killers I believe there exists a blind, quivering, shrieking desire to be revenged upon God, or Life, or Fate, or Society, for these atrocities and horrors; and with this desire we cannot but feel sympathy. It ought to be a permanent part of every man's basic philosophy to have this feeling of implacable indignation against the creator of the universe.

But why punish yourself with violences against nature, when by using your power of forgetting these horrors you can reach a stoical calm and yet remain undrugged?

If there is a malevolent spirit in the cosmos—as there most clearly is—who rejoices in such abominations, the best revenge upon such a spirit is not to cry:—“Hell! Let's have a drink!” but with Machiavelian cunning to slip aside from the crowd and allow

those simple, primitive, eternal aspects of nature which require no sophistication to be your healing draughts of Lethe.

If violent alternations of ennui and pleasure destroy, as by degrees they do destroy, our power to respond to the magic of the universe; if they destroy, as by degrees they do destroy, our power of enjoying a calm and thrilling happiness, why on earth should we revenge ourselves upon an unsympathetic First Cause by helping him to torment us?

A much better revenge would it be—satisfying a much more subtle malice—if by the cunning manipulation of the machinery of the mind we succeeded in forgetting these horrors which the First Cause inflicts upon man, and which men inflict upon one another, and gave ourselves up to a concentrated art of solitude, which, like a secret Earthly Paradise, the gods have grudged at our attaining.

We do not need philosophy to drive us to work. Necessity will do that. What we need philosophy for is to heighten our life in those moments when we can live to ourselves. We need philosophy to kill boredom, to destroy inertia, to dispel lethargy, to drive away weariness, to overcome a sense of futility.

And the only philosophy that can do this is one that is based upon the actual life-quiver, life-pulsation, life-

thrust of the self, as it wrestles with the not-self.

The beginning and the end of any "philosophy of solitude" is the control of the mind by the mind, of the self by the self. Then, when it is in command of its own interior being, it can select from the vast mass of the impinging "not-self" some aspect of the inanimate that particularly suits it and into which it can sink and be at peace.

It is a pitiful degeneracy in our modern life that we are not more often transported out of ourselves by the eternal things that surround us.

Consider the wind! One of the best tests you can apply to yourself as to whether you are lost to the primeval grandeur of the world, taking it all for granted, is to note your attitude to the arbitrary motions of the wind. Do you take the wind for granted? Do you only notice it at all if it is wildly furious, madly violent, bitterly freezing? Or, on the other hand, is the least breath of it upon your face like the touch of the remote Past? Do you never feel it without thinking what a miraculous phenomenon it is, this invisible and yet most living presence, as it moves over the city, over the land, over the sea? Nothing can excel the wind in awakening from the depths of our

natures those far-away memories which seem to carry with them the very essence of life.

The potency of memory is that it winnows and purges reality of its grossness, of its dullness, of its poisonous hurtings. Memory seems to retain, in great hushed vases and urns, at the bottom of its being, essences that have the power of redeeming all. And the wind stirs up these essences until their fleeting perfumes mount to our heads and fill us with an indescribable transport.

If there is the least breath of wind moving between the walls when you go out on the streets of the city, it is a strange obliquity not to grow aware of it to the extinction of all other impressions. What you grow aware of is not the mere wetness, or coolness, or saltiness, or balminess, of its feeling against your skin. It is what it calls up out of your deepest mind!

There is more in the memory of each one of us than mere personal recollections. There is a dark-hidden store of race-memories hidden there, buried beneath our own life's casual impressions. Images, scenes, subtle and indescribable feelings, are stirred up from these sacred urns and vases at the bottom of the mind as the wind blows upon our face. Some of them are feelings that once belonged to our father, to our mother; some of them to our grandparents; some perhaps even to

their parents! For the most precious possession of our humanity consists of these vague, obscure, half-realized feelings that descend to us from the long burden of recurrent emotions experienced by our forefathers all the way down the ages.

And the touch of the wind has the power of bringing back these things more than anything else.

Walking, riding, sailing, labouring, adventuring, all the lonely individuals from whose seed we spring have in their time felt this wind—this identical north-west wind—blow upon their faces. And we their descendants, in the streets of Manchester, or of Cape Town, or of Toronto, or of St. Louis, feel the far-off exultations that these men of old time felt, under the breath of that wind.

These old exultations having to do with the continuity of human life, and with the ultimate reactions of our flesh and blood to the sense of life, are far more important than any of our bustling, present-day practical schemes.

These vague, obscure memories, half-psychic, half-physical, stirred up by the wind, are—when some essence of them stirs within us, or some sudden aerial perspective of their grouping hovers about us—the very symbols for us of the long procession of our days between cradle and grave.



They are the awakening, too, within us of a mysterious unity with these old, dead, lonely people, whose wandering thoughts as they moved in their solitude over the earth sowed the seeds of our thoughts. The midnight spray blowing into the face of one of them with his hand on the tiller, the morning smell of the ploughed-earth snuffed up by the nostrils of another with his hand on the plough, the noise of the birds in the high trees caught by a third as he mounted his horse at noon, all these things come to us now like the ringing of a Mass-bell. And religious in the deepest sense they are; for they are the Platonic essences of things that pass and yet are eternal. Carried down the generations upon the breath of the oldest of all humanity's elemental companions they lift us into an "ampler ether, a diviner air."

The metaphysical concept of "the Absolute," as applied to the mystic substratum of all life, has recently sunk into disrepute; but that great, and indeed in some senses awe-inspiring idea, had a very definite place to fill in supplying an explanation of a certain quite frequent human experience.

When the sickening pressure of the everlasting duality in things, this good and this evil, this happiness and this unhappiness, melted away in some transported

mood the mind of man named this feeling "the Absolute."

And what the self who has succeeded in isolating itself sufficiently, so as to feel the inmost murmur of the abyss, experiences in this "premeditated ecstasy" corresponds to this outworn concept.

Any fragment of external matter will serve it as a representation of the vast objective world; although if such a fragment possesses elements of what we call "beauty" the self will find the celebration of its secular Mass easier to attain. Where the great mystics fail us is that their ecstasies come by chance. They record their feelings. They make their feelings the basis of their new conception of life; but the thing falls into focus only once or twice, perhaps, in the whole history of their days.

It is just here that we can take a hint from the historic rational thinkers—such as Hegel—whose whole attitude is hostile to mystical illuminations.

Our "Absolute" too, like that of Hegel, or even of Spinoza, must be attainable at any moment and in any mood.

Man were in a sorry plight were he dependent for the living secret of his earth-life upon the wayward, unaccountable chances of mystical illumination. Towards such great moments his whole aim, purpose,

and will-power must be unceasingly directed. His ecstasy must be "premeditated" or its value is lost. And this is precisely what the mind can achieve. Modern fashions of thinking have done a deadly hurt to the happiness of our race by their insistence upon the helplessness of the mind and the will.

But no wonder this fatal paralysis has stolen upon us when our life beneath the pressure of modern industry has lost the urge to solitude.

The clue-word, and it is tragically significant that it has become what it has, to all our modern pleasures, is the word "escape." Escape from what, and into what? Alas! escape from ourselves and into the whirlpool of the crowd! There is only one true escape from the pressure of the not-self upon the self—and this is a sinking down into the mystery of the inanimate. Such an escape is a realization, a consummation.

The self fixes its attention upon a patch of barren earth, let us say, or an empty flower-pot, or a broken flagstone, or a stretch of sand, or a door-threshold, or a dead tree-stump, or even a little fragment of sky, and by flinging forth its spirit into this thing, while it creates for itself and for it—even in the midst of the hubbub of the city—a circumference of isolation,

the gates that enclose the mystery of matter roll back and deep calls unto deep.

Another way—and to most minds an easier one—is to make your “fragment of matter” nothing less than the whole surrounding air, with its lights and shadows, its contours and colours, its animates and inanimates, its over-arching sky and leafy or stony vistas, its foreground and background.

Into this surrounding space, as you sit, or stand, or lie, as necessity may dictate, you fling forth your spirit; and the spirit of what you are gazing at—for every scene that exists hath its spirit—flows back responsively into your mind; until between your mind and this cubic segment of the cosmos there comes to be established a strange and rhythmical harmony, lulling your senses and liberating your soul with a feeling for which at present human language has no name.

One of the chief causes of unhappiness in the world is that our mind is preoccupied all the while with its relation with other human minds. Free yourself from this; make the friendliest and kindest retreat you can into solitude; and in a few moments your nature will have bathed itself so deeply in the cool baths of primordial Being that you will feel yourself able to return

to the troubling arena of humanity with an inviolable and a secret strength.

No, when we are driven to select some fragment of the external world to fix our attention upon, which is devoid of beauty, as the "point d'appui" of our plunge into the Unfathomable, it is only because the particular cubic space between earth and sky which happens to surround us is blocked, cluttered up, invaded, by shapes and forms which are grossly destructive of our pre-meditated ecstasy.

Like the Negro who serves in the station latrine we are driven to use an old cigar-box with a clay pipe lying on its coloured lid, or a broken rush-back chair, or a gleam of sunshine falling on the edge of a bucket.

Like the patient in the hospital-bed we are driven to use a pool of moonlight on the floor, or the yellow light of a gas-jet upon the corner of a neighbour's pillow, or an old jam-pot containing a few drooping flowers.

Like the prisoner in the mad-house we are forced to use the pallid northern glimmer in the frame of a barred window.

Those thrice-fortunate persons whose dwelling is in the country have at their disposal, every day and every hour, a wide-open spacious gateway into the receding Unknown. These lucky ones have a scene at their very

threshold, made up of earth and air and clouds and grass and trees, such as, isolated by the brooding mind from the rest of the landscape, is soon found to be impregnated, as they fling their spirit into it, with a lovely, withdrawing, recessive magic.

Sensitive natures could formerly take refuge in God. Now they can acquire the art of taking refuge in the Mystery of Matter.

What exactly are the conscious thoughts, what exactly are the sensations and feelings, which we deliberately call up—for they are more or less the same in everyone—as we move towards the ecstasy we are struggling to evoke?

The first action of the mind is rather a negative than a positive one. It is the action of forgetting. It is necessary to force ourselves to forget our domestic worries, our money worries, our emotional worries, together with all those unbearable horrors that no effort of ours can affect. "Impossible!" you will say. Not at all! Our mere faith in our power of forgetting is itself a gesture of annihilating magic. Why not? In the great chaotic ocean of life we all share something of the creative and destructive force that perpetually destroys and re-creates the world.

Like a devilish paralysis, grey, numb, ghastly, sick-

ening, idiotic, there lies upon our life-impulse in these modern days the dead hand of a pseudo-scientific, crowd-conscious defeatism, in regard to the miracles that individual minds can work.

And it is not as though we did not all feel conscious of this miraculous power within ourselves. Call it, if you please, a crazy illusion. You cannot deny that it is there. If you yourself do not feel it, others do. Feel what? Feel a miraculous, magical life-power surging through them! Feel in the depths of their mind a god-like sensation, as if they could say to these cloud-edifices of towering menace:— "Vanish from before me!" As if they could say to the scene framed in their window, or in the doorway, or observed from their seat by the road-side:— "Reveal to me your Secret!"

It is a noble and heroic sacrifice in the self-forgetting agitator to devote himself to changing the conditions under which his fellows are oppressed and trampled on. But because these changes have to be made, is that any reason why he should allow the magical power in his own soul to atrophy and perish?

Well then! The first action of the mind in the person who wishes to reach this premeditated ecstasy is a negative one, the commanding to disappear of these devilish worries that drain the living udders of the soul like snakes at the teats of cows.

For you must remember that if the particular worry that bulks largest today were removed by some exterior turn of luck, another would assuredly take its place and would hinder you in its turn from retreating to your shrine before the sacred inanimate. So command them, as if you were a real magician, as assuredly we all are, to take themselves off!

Modern psychology, by its tiresome trick of giving morbid and disparaging names to the most powerful gestures of the mind, would seek to fix some label upon what you are now doing; a label which would turn this gesture of spiritual authority into a grimace of weak insanity.

But that is the advantage of your being a solitary person. You have already learnt the device of regarding modern psychology with a detached and sceptical eye, just as you have learnt the device of hardening yourself against what—though perhaps erroneously—the crowd-consciousness calls its sense of humour.

Now that you have made your mind a blank as far as your worries are concerned, the thing to do is to make yourself as porous, as receptive, as yielded up as you can to the magic of the scene before you. I say "magic" with a definite technical intention; and not at all for the pretty sound of this excellent word. For the whole art of this spiritual conjuring-trick depends



upon what aspect, what element, what quality, in the scene before you, you select to concentrate upon. It is no use coming to your fragment of Nature with the eye of a forester or a gardener or a farmer or a natural historian. You must come to it, if I may use such comparisons, like an inhuman idol-worshipper, or like an idolatrous but self-absorbed lover.

It is necessary to keep the hope of a rapturous ecstasy before our mind; but as a matter of fact if there were nothing to be gained by such intense and concentrated contemplation beyond those supreme transports, few souls would be persuaded to undertake so dubious a quest. For, as Wordsworth truly says, the impact of the world has weighed so heavily upon most of us that these ultimate ecstasies, these "fallings from us" and "vanishings," are within reach of very few.

But the point is there are many degrees, measures, gradations, levels of solitary contemplation. To be totally caught up in a blind, overpowering, self-forgetful transport may indeed be exceptional. We must struggle for it, however, for some do reach it; and it is on the road thither that our contemplation of this particular fragment of objective Mystery brings such a rich and satisfying experience. What the mere road to this ultimate consummation between the self and the not-self brings, as we set out upon it, is one of the

most important emotions, quite apart from the transport itself, that the experience of life can offer us.

One of the causes of the vague unhappiness, restlessness, dissatisfaction, which so many of us feel, is that we have never attempted to grasp life from the right angle.

Instead of pausing in our multifarious activities, instead of putting aside our laborious quests, we are being perpetually fooled into thinking that happiness is to be reached in the same way as pleasure is, by the possession of something.

What people on the contrary find to their astonishment is that it is when they drop—under some tremendous disappointment or under some spiritual shock—this eternal striving and clutching, that real happiness for the first time in their life comes flowing in upon them in a brimming flood. This is not only the doctrine of the "Tao"; it is also the doctrine of Christ, but our crowd-perverted minds have not, in these thousands of years, appropriated this simple revelation.

The art lies in the embrace of those elemental accompaniments of existence which are as a rule taken so stupidly for granted.

It is the eternal scenery of life that is the important

thing; not the objects of our restless search upon the life-stage. It is the stage itself that holds the ultimate secret! You will find it a matter of universal experience that the men and women who are happiest in this world are those to whom the mere spectacle—without taking it upon themselves to do anything “about it”—is all sufficient.

Perhaps it is fortunate for humanity that there are so many heroic souls who fling all thought of personal happiness to the wind in their passionate love of justice and right. They make their choice; but even among these the least unhappy ones are clearly those who isolate themselves sufficiently from the rest to be able to contemplate the mad mêlée from the vantage-ground of some interior mental detachment.

You may say that in such bad times as these, when all who have food and shelter and freedom from money-panics have to count themselves lucky, it is an irrelevance to discuss states of purely mental well-being.

When mariners are desperately fighting a murderous storm, who pauses to argue about the nature of the Will to Power? As a matter of actual experience people do discuss such things at surprisingly unexpected moments. Even soldiers on the battlefield have been known to argue about the existence of God, and

to exchange thoughts about the immortality of the soul.

Whatever active crisis we are facing, occasions arrive when the mind hesitates and fluctuates at some cross-road of purely contemplative thought. No activity—short of a desperate life-and-death struggle and not always even then—precludes the stream of conscious impressions, or puts an end to sensations, attractions, repulsions, with their alternating spasms of misery and exultation.

Life is sensation, and our activity must be of a rare and desperate order for sensation to stop.

Yes; even in the most cataclysmic times the majority of people have plenty of moments when they can think this way or that way about the secret of the universe. And never in history has it been more important for the individual to think deep and long, when the whole tendency of collective life is doing what it can to take the glamour of existence and kill it.

But a man's life, a woman's life can be lived like a thing of magic still, if we will only be obstinate, crafty and lonely.

The sun has not fallen from the sky; nor has the moon ceased from her seasons. The winds have not folded themselves up forever; nor have the clouds

forgotten the chart of their aerial roads. The sea-tides have not faltered in their alternations. The dews of our evenings are not less healing than they were when Judas hanged himself, or than when Achilles trailed Hector at the heel of his chariot.

Who has not heard of the psychological phenomenon known as Conversion? Well! just as the secular life of contemplation celebrates its own natural Mass, so there must come sometimes to a crowd-poisoned personality a startling moment of awakening that is exactly like a religious Conversion.

We suddenly feel as if we had never beheld the actual face of the world before. In shame we recognize how many suns, how many moons, have come and gone, without one real flash of conscious awareness transporting our heavy souls. And we remember in a rush of remorse like the prodigal's weeping with what a hard, corrupt, averted eye we have caught without catching, and noted without noting, that labouring moon, that melting and liquid landscape, those enchanted hedgerows.

It is not merely the aesthetic or the poetical reaction to these things that I have in mind. What I am thinking of is an eternal necessity of human nature, like the

eating or drinking of some sort of planetary sacrament, which is neglected at our peril.

Yes, you can be as thick-skinned and unpoetical as you please; but there is a primeval necessity, harsh, inhuman, rugged, formidable—not in the least “artistic” or sentimental—about keeping our eye upon sun, moon, earth, sky, sea, and letting our nature grow “native and indued” to these solemn powers.

There are, as I have hinted, many measures, levels, gradations, in this premeditated ecstasy.

An “ecstasy,” in its proper, derivative sense, is a mood when you are, as we say, “beside yourself.” But this delirious self-abandoned rapture is only one aspect of the austere contemplation that I have in mind.

Over and over again with most of us our experience will be that alone with this deserted stretch of sand, with this moon-lit unoccupied road, with this twilit window-sill with its single flower-pot against the sky, before reaching any abandoned ecstasy, what we grow aware of is a lovely calm sensation, in which everything becomes an airy sea of insubstantiality, with rocking, undulating waves and a luminous atmosphere.

Even if our personal nature is such that we are too old, or too materialistic, or too cynical, or too lethargic, or too sick, to create the eventual ecstasy I speak of,

it will be enough of an achievement if we attain this calm, detached, non-human serenity of spirit.

This mood may not yet be "the peace that passeth all understanding." We may have to go a step further in our initiation to gain this; but the luminous serenity we have already reached is something in itself so desirable that it is alone fully worth all the concentration we have given up to this whole quest.

For in this calm of mind, in this hushed, tremulous, diffused quietude, we grow conscious not only of the receding mystery of the Unfathomable—where the chemistry of matter as we steadily concentrate upon it, turns into something that is different from "matter"—but we grow conscious too of the whole tragic and heroic panorama of man's history upon earth.

Whether in that final ecstasy where tower up the ramparts of the City of God at the end of the way, all these tangible, more earthly thoughts are lost, no initiate has ever told us. Those who have experienced that ecstasy are debarred by its very nature from being able to recall by what thoughts—tangible or otherwise—they were accompanied in this transport.

But in this large, calm, luminous mood, with a feeling of the earth, as the mother of us all, carrying us through lonely space, certain delicate and volatile essences float towards us from far-off days in our own

life. Not logical in their arrival, not logical in their departure, these voyaging fragments of human experience seem to make everything luminous and porous. One by one they flow through our "serene and blessed mood," transfiguring all the objects they touch.

Pictures they are and yet more than pictures, for they carry with them layers and layers of subtle emotional reactions to their own evasive burden. They bring us something far more deeply steeped in the mystery of life than the mere memories of one person.

As we fix our mind on this particular doorway, or this particular window, or lift up our eyes from this heap of stones and glance at the rain-wet hedge, we suddenly discover that these memories which are passing through our mind are in some strange way sacred. This sacredness does not seem entirely accounted for by the mere fact that they are events in the remote past, untouched by the jarrings and discords of the present. Nor is it accounted for by the fact that they are vaguely and obscurely recalled. It is a sacredness that carries some unknown life-secret with it.

It is as though these memory-pictures that come floating by were "intimations of immortality," witnesses to some curious and beautiful fatality amid the casual happenings of our life, not recognized in the



least by ourselves at the time, but deepening now in its meaning and significance to something ineffable, under the atmosphere of our present mood.

For as these visions come floating past, as if the hollow shell of space confronting the lonely self were a transparent crystal, the mind does not press upon them or try to retain them, or seek to follow them beyond their fleeting passage. The mind, indeed, seems to have an inkling that there is more in these memories than just what happened to us as individuals. They seem to have a life of their own, over there in that strange country, from which they floated in upon us, or slid down to us, along the slippery corridors of Time. They would tease us, they would baffle us, they would tantalize us by their equivocal nature if it were not that our concentrated mood is full of such deep peace that it is willing to be soothed rather than tormented by such mysteries.

Out of the trouble and pain, out of the conflicts and confusions in which our race is tossing on its fever-bed we are driven to recognize that the time has come for a complete re-adjustment of values. All comes back to the individual. All comes back to the solitary mind brooding upon the ancient mystery of the universe.

And as it ponders on these things it is likely enough

that the lonely mind, at this hour of its long pilgrimage, may feel that some sort of entire reversal of human thought is desirable. Until now the whole stress has been laid upon the Outward by the West, and upon the Inward by the East. Neither in the Outward of external machinery nor in the Inward of metaphysical speculation is the happiness of the individual to be found.

It is to be found in that universal but neglected region of those lovely essences which are partly sensuous and partly psychic, secret undertones and overtones in all men's lives, that have naught to do with what we practically achieve, naught to do with what we theoretically speculate, and in opposition to both West and East are composed of the filmy stuff of that middle region, that region so much nearer the ego's real life than either practical activity or metaphysical systems, wherein the self feels its way among sensations that melt into thoughts and among thoughts that thicken into sensations; where "everything that lives is holy," and where the life of consciousness plunges like a diver seeking pearls, in and out of the less organized life of the inanimate.

For we are all of us in touch—however we may be persecuted by one another—with some aspect of the

non-human cosmos into which we can flee away and be at rest. Our "point d'appui" may be a barred window in a newly constructed prison or it may be a terrace-walk in an ancient manorial garden. The self at bay can plunge into the mystical chemistry of the Non-Human, into that portion of the Not-Self which is outside the lively-peering faces of its human fellows, and be aware of a calm and wonderful relief.

Every self in the world is at bay; for it has been born into a world where loneliness is scarcely allowed. And being at bay the self can fling its nature forth with such creative energy upon the inanimate that the inanimate becomes impregnated with its character.

Why do we torment ourselves with human beings, when the inanimate can be made as porous as a sponge to the character of our most secret self? In company or out of company, if we can acquire the art of letting our minds sink down into the inanimate we shall find peace; and find a peace too that in the nature of the case can do no harm to any living creature!

The Inanimate—such as earth, stone, rock, water, air, vapour—is a better refuge for the self at bay than what is loosely called Nature. For Nature, even where free from humanity, is full of struggling, contending, teeming lives, each with its own intense self-assertion. How curious it is that each individual soul with such

a longing for peace and space and freedom should be caught in such a crowded world!

It is from our lonely communings with whatever fragments of far-drawn planetary chemistry we can reach, found here, found there as we avoid the crowd, that the feelings come to us that give us power to hold our human irritations, our human jealousies in contempt, and think magnanimously of our enemies.

Human anger resembles an evil magnetism that runs like black fire from nervous organism to nervous organism. When it is met by a non-conducting force it recedes and is dispersed. Such a non-conducting force is that chemistry of large impassiveness that we draw down into ourselves, that we draw up into ourselves, from the primeval elements. Saturated with this primordial chemistry of the ancient silences we can receive with a humility, born of a pride older than that of Lucifer, those pin-pricks to our hot, fussy, human vanity, which the crowded commerce of life thrusts upon us.

Propitiate! Yield! Submit! Bow down your head! Let the foolish egoism of paltry self-assertion dissolve in an egoism that goes far deeper. You must learn to use something more subtle and far less malicious than ironical submission. Then will your inmost being, far from feeling itself reduced, humiliated, conquered,

rise up like a dark inviolable fire through the crannies and crevices of your apparent defeat, mount up and up and up; and finally gather itself together in that cold, high, translunar, psychic ether, wherein the powers of the air commune with the powers of the air. In the cosmos there is so much earth, so much water, so much rock, so much air, so much sand, that unless destiny has hemmed us in in the worst kind of city-slum—and even there if we are strong and crafty enough there are loop-holes of freedom—we can find some air-space, or sky-space, or earth-space, despite our mechanical civilization, in which we may plunge our spirit and feel alone and free. Under our feet the earth, above our heads the sky; while the murmur of the generations, “not harsh nor grating” as it reaches us while we thrust back the intrusive present, mingles with that deeper sound, audible only to ears purged by solitude, whereby the mystery of the Inanimate whispers to itself below the noises of the world.

## THE SELF AND "THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

WE MUST BRING BACK PHILOSOPHY...A PHILOSOPHY OF OUR OWN...A STATIC VIEW OF LIFE...FORGETTING OUR REAL SELVES...PSYCHOANALYSIS...A PHILOSOPHY OF WALKING...NATURE THE REFUGE...NATURE THE AVENGER...THE INFLUENCE OF THE INANIMATE...ANIMAL-VEGETABLE CONSCIOUSNESS...MALAISE...RELIGION AND LUST...TWILIGHT...THE ULTIMATE MYSTERY

PHILOSOPHY must be brought back! Too long has there been this ghastly gap between the discoveries and the theories of Science and the actual lives of men and women. Philosophy has been lost in the confusion of our inventions. It has been lost in our economic struggles. It has been lost in our wars, in our diplomacies, in our revolts and reactions.

All these things are important. Society must be organized, and its organization must be reformed, transformed, revolutionized.

But meanwhile, below all these upheavals, below all these public changes, below our inventions and

improvements, the daily life of men and women has to go on. And the important essence of this daily life lies in a muted under-flow of sensations and feelings and dejections and exultations that are entirely personal to ourselves. It is in this daily life that we are conscious of the ghastly gap that exists between all these outward events, these public events, and the intimate, continuous stream of our personal experience.

Hunger and sex, food to eat and freedom to satisfy our desire, these things are of much greater importance than all these agitating public affairs.

The way Society is organized, or disorganized, the way we are governed, or misgoverned, the tone and temper of public opinion, do undoubtedly exercise a tragic influence upon the contentment or the frustration of our hunger for food and for sex-satisfaction.

But granting all this, granting that our belly's hunger and our erotic craving have, somehow or other, been tolerably contented, is that all?

What of the steady, unceasing stream of personal consciousness that flows on and on, flows like an undulating, constant tide round and above our labour, our meals, our love-making? Our hunger may be satisfied, our love-cravings, our lust-cravings may be

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

satisfied—but still we find ourselves mysteriously, unaccountably restless, ill at ease, unhappy.

And this unhappiness is nearer us, is more sharp and pressing, more intimate and important, than anything in life except food and sleep.

What are the causes of it? In the first place ambition and competition! We brood over the esteem, or lack of esteem, in the minds of others. Are we superior, are we inferior to these others? Is our superiority widely recognized? Are we making a "success" of our life?

Now all these worries persecute our minds beyond the necessary point. Some degree of attention we must perforce give them, or both food and sex-satisfaction may fail us. But beyond this basic degree there is no need to go. When once our daily meals are assured us and our sex-satisfaction is no longer threatened, we ought to devote our whole attention to those sensations of our personal life that have absolutely nothing to do with how other people regard us.

We must bring back philosophy! It is philosophy we all need at this juncture.

Christianity has already molded our character up to a certain point; and this effect upon us remains, whatever our attitude may now be to the existence of God or to the teaching of Christ.



But Religion—I speak for a large majority in our Western Nations—although still loosely accepted, because we are too lazy and indifferent to think about it, no longer plays any dominant part in our lives. It has made us a little more sympathetic, especially in the case of physical pain, a little kinder, a little less prone to brutal callousness; but the larger portion of this virtue is due to the general moral atmosphere about us, not to any direct pressure of Christian doctrine upon ourselves.

We must bring back philosophy! Religion has narrowed its appeal. Science in trying to fill the gap has, alas, only shown an impulsive amateurishness in this direction. Economics has become so enormous a matter that only experts can cope with such a thing.

But meanwhile we have got to live; and to live with any degree of dignity and happiness some sort of personal philosophy is absolutely essential. Such philosophy need not set out to explain the mystery of life; how it all came; whither it is all going. What philosophy has ever really explained how the teeming multiplicity of life sprang forth out of the level ocean of the Absolute?

Philosophy has put such questions rationally, technically, and even for some minds clearly, but it has not answered one single one of them. We stand in

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

these ultimate matters exactly where we stood in the days of Thales, whose name, usually appearing at the head of the philosophic roll, is associated with the element of water.

All the same, we must bring back philosophy! For philosophy is not only valuable because it offers explanations. Philosophy is valuable because it shows how to dispense with explanations. Philosophy is valuable because it concentrates thought and because it heightens life.

The fact that philosophy has not explained what neither Religion nor Science has explained—for the magnetic, electric, dynamic theories of creation come no whit nearer the real crux than the Biblical "Let there be Light!"—is that any reason for allowing our personal existence—perhaps the only existence we shall ever know—to go drifting and rudderless, at the mercy of such whoreson goblins as cynical ennui and disillusioned desperation?

We must bring back philosophy! Yes, and having brought it back we must apply it to all the bites and stings and kisses and caresses, to all the bitter sweetness and paradisiac torment of our actual experience.

Where is the life-smart, the life-twinge, the life-spasm, the life-tickling, the life-thrust, the life-parry? In our stream of thoughts! Or rather—for it is not so

much like a stream as like a mirror—in our soul, our ego, our conscious self, as we move about.

Men and women have, in fact, never dared to express their secret awareness of how little either the old religion or the new science has ever affected this actual field of personal consciousness which smarts and quivers and bleeds and bubbles under the impact of what we have to bear. What are you thinking of, at this very moment, as you let your fingers drop from your typewriter, or as you lean back in your chair, or as you poke the fire, or shut the window, or issue forth from your factory-yard?

We must bring back philosophy!

It is ironical to think how the real crucial twinges of our daily endurances and the real delicious transports of our daily releases are so seldom—almost never—dealt with in a philosophic spirit. Psychoanalysis rules us today with its terminology drawn from the Greek Lexicon; but the real emotions which we experience seem always so much more diffused and subtle, so much less raw, and reeking and mad, than when they are fished up with a hook in their gills.

But all these theories will change. It is better to philosophize for oneself than be psychoanalyzed by another. Doubtless in particular cases people are

helped by these methods; but what we suffer from is its indiscriminate application. One indeed begins to feel at the present time that what one wants is not any further naming, by semi-classical nomenclature, of our nervous manias, but an authentic classical philosophy, by which to steer our own life and deal with our own neurotic weaknesses.

A good example of the danger of allowing psychology to usurp the place of philosophy can be seen in the way we are all bullied now by the advocates of sex-freedom and sex-shamelessness. What a ridiculous pass to have come to, when a mere local, transitory, soon-to-vanish fashion of current thought, with its humorous chat about "complexes," can assume such preposterous authority as to parade itself as the last word of intellectual enlightenment!

The intellect has nothing to do with it. Our attitude to sex is a purely personal affair, a matter of taste; and there is no more reason why we should be herded into a sex-riot than into a sex-suppression.

Who has uttered the infallible dictum that we must give up all the dignity and charm and grace that come from personal self-control and natural reticence, and fall on our knees before the Crowd-Confessional, filling the air with erotic babblings and exposing our nakedness—no pretty sight—to every passer-by?

We must bring back Philosophy! It is indeed only in the strength of a real, original, personal philosophy of his own that a man can acquire that mixture of profound independence and conciliatory politeness that will enable him to steer his course between the fashions of the crowd and his own special forms of eccentricity.

Spiritually speaking when it comes to questions of the nerves we need a philosophy of our own far more than we need the psychiatrist. There is a very subtle implication involved here. A psychiatrist assumes of course that we are in a morbid, unhealthy, abnormal state, or he would not concern himself with us; for he is a scientist studying the abnormal. The spiritual aura of his mental assumption, that we are in an abnormal and therefore an undesirable state emanates from him as he enters our presence.

But of a surety our own mental power—the magic of our own soul—is of more value in the matter of our personal happiness than the assumption that we are in an undesirable state and ought to submit ourselves to be cured by these new methods.

It is the old despotism of all medicine-men:—"Down on your knees, young man! I won't rest in peace till I see you on your knees!" Thus I overheard a spiritual despot say once to a wilful neophyte. But

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

I would rather say to him:—"You who are a magician without knowing it; command the Demon and he will flee from you." And if my obsessed youth told me that the Devil obeyed him not, I would answer:—"Have faith in the power of your will. Have faith that you can will to forget; and then slowly, little by little, you will forget your Demon. Day by day, week by week, he will fade. You will have forgotten him into invisibility, and finally into non-existence!"

Where the whole current of crowd-instincts in these days is so fatally perverted is in the stress laid upon outward things, upon outward achievement, outward progress, outward activity, outward publicity. The idea of what might be called "the Philosophy of Elementalism" is that all this outwardness should be reduced to the vanishing point.

Indeed the hour has come for solitary men and women to aim for a static view of life, as against all this whole business of striving towards something. By a "static view of life" I mean that attitude wherein the mind, sinking back upon itself, envisages all the events of its existence in a sort of simultaneity, as if they were spread out before it like an unrolled map.

When the people of one's life become intolerable it is certainly the path of wisdom to escape. But there

are weapons in the armory of the mind that ought to be at least tried before we bolt. There is for example a certain detached and tragic way of accepting the people of our life, however cruelly their immediate presence may have hurt us, or bruised us, or outraged us, or fretted our nerves to the breaking-point, that may alleviate at least half of the torture.

Throw the whole spectacle back, away from you, into the distance, into a certain atmospheric perspective.

Whether there is another life or not, this particular picture, lamentable, piteous, mysterious, touching, strange, can never return—no! not through all eternity!

These human figures, loved so well, hated so well, these human figures whose ways have given life its glamour, its interest, its pain, appear, when you now gaze at them at this distance, like shapes in an inevitable drama that could not have been otherwise. Most of these people—even as we ourselves—are a mixture of good and evil; but in this static view of them which only a real philosophic focus can give us, and which no psychological analysis of their manias, or of our manias, can possibly give us, their personalities assume something of that wistful quality that sleep and death alone can bestow.

Out of the Unthinkable we have come to this—to this picture of the human tragedy—and from this picture, from the pressure of all these phantom shapes upon us, we shall soon pass once again into the Unthinkable.

Is it worth it, then, to poison our brief days with angry grievances, with bitter upbraidings and lamentable self-pity? None of these strange figures of this tragic picture asked to be born what they are, any more than we ourselves asked to be born what we are.

Impenetrable darkness is the frame of this picture. Impenetrable darkness will soon roll over it forever. Meanwhile, there it is before us, our tragedy among all the other earth-tragedies; and it is in our power to think worthily of it, or to think unworthily.

True philosophy, nurtured in the depths of that vast under-sea of unfathomable silence that enfolds us all, has a potent poetry of its own which it can throw over those forlorn figures. Each one of them—the worst with the best—has a mysterious and touching uniqueness. It is pitifully and reproachfully itself. And it never once lifted up its voice in its pre-natal Limbo, saying, "Let me be created so!"

And ever as we gaze at this phantasmal picture—which is our life, the ghost-mummers of our play,—there breathes that far-off breath from the outer spaces,



from beyond the last star-galaxy, which reminds us that no man has ever understood the real mystery of another man, or pitied him enough, or forgiven him enough.

Who is the accuser? Is the Cause of all life the accuser? Whelm us, whelm us in your waves of non-human absolution, ye inanimate elements! And if the Accuser be the First Cause, whelm It too in the same absolution, the absolution of primordial Matter—innocent of all ill—out of which It created such a world!

Again and again when the mind has won the peace it craves, when out of the midst of the hurly-burly it has called upon the ampler airs of Space and the larger perspectives of Time to redeem it from the feverish pressure of the Immediate, there is presented unto us—the same for all men living—the inescapable, double imperative: to endure and enjoy, in defiance of life's cruelty, the non-human mystery around us, and to fight obstinately, and *sans cesse*, that others may endure and enjoy it too.

There are certain men and women in the world—some of them known to fame; most of them irretrievably forgotten—who consciously reverse this ultimate Double Imperative and struggle primarily that others may endure and enjoy.

These persons may be designated as "Saints" though

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

no official canonization will ever await them. Such people are rare; but they are less rare than we sometimes suppose; for their instinct is to conceal this startling reversal of normal human values that has taken place in their hearts. They are totally different from the sweet-natured, unselfish persons whose goodness is so natural a thing that we often take it thanklessly for granted. These simple-minded, unselfish people are the salt of the earth; but they differ from the Saint in a certain lack of imagination, formidableness, originality, magnetism; and, to put it plainly, intellect.

Neither on behalf of “number one,” as the saying is, nor on behalf of other people, do these simple ones in their unselfish good-nature use the powers of intellect and imagination in the warfare of life. Thus though their heart, as we put it, “is in the right place,” their brain is apt to miss many subtleties in the twisted fabric out of which our human fate is made.

A good example of a real Saint now living in this world and exerting a formidable and really intellectual influence upon Society is the Japanese writer, Kagawa, a personality so great as to be completely devoid of the various too-human weaknesses that most spiritual-minded men betray. A really intellectual Saint like this one has so deep and so formidable an intelligence that it irks him to wear his sainthood, so

to speak, on his sleeve, or in any way to make a fuss about unessentials in dress, habits, ways or methods.

In dealing with human society the intellectual Saint's methods will be profoundly opportunist—even to the point of Machiavellianism.

The hour is at hand, yea! has now come, when a vast number of individuals in our Western Nations will decide to detach themselves, not aggressively, or with any theatrical fuss, but obstinately, craftily and constantly, from such aspects of modern life—like our insane mania for automobiles—which tend to destroy that basic poetry upon which a calmly happy human life depends. These life-escapers on wheels have no very happy expression. The speed of their cars is an index of their miserable distraction. They are fleeing at this frantic pace from the Demon of Boredom.

Albert Dürer, if we resurrected him, could engrave this Demon, and set him at the side of all these callous, reckless, feather-brained drivers, spurring them to go yet faster! The look that Albert Dürer would put into this Arch-Devil's face would be a fine symbol of our civilization. Can you not see him there, wild with the lust of speed and destruction? A mania for automobiles may, of course, be as harmless a "penchant" in a person's life as a mania for postage stamps. But it

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

is hard not to detect something sinister in it when it ceases to be the natural satisfaction of the innate explorer and wanderer in us and becomes either a vulgar barometer of our success in life or a baseless enlarging of our personal importance while we remain perfectly insignificant.

All these crowd-manias for indulging ourselves to the limit in the inventive power of Science are devices in human nature by which we can forget our real selves. They are the unpleasant symptoms that betray something mysteriously wrong with the constitution of our spirit. We have lost the love of life in its simple forms. We are so bored, that it would not be really unpleasant, to our secret spirit of destructiveness, if we were to break our necks.

And parallel with this mania for swift movement, comes a mania for reducing by a rough-and-ready “argot” of gangster-slang everything that gives dignity to our human tragedy. One cause of it is the gloomy harshness of industrial life. This flings our people headlong into any distraction. Away, away, away! Out of ourselves, if it's into stench, brimstone, sulphur and burning hell!

But the larger part of it is simply and solely—and we have got to accept it—the steady degradation of our taste by people who make money out of our cor-

ruption. Yes, where our modern pleasures are not a substitute for suicide—partaking in themselves of all the psychological symptoms of self-slaughter—they are a voluptuous orgy of self-degradation.

We have reached such a point that our response to the eternal elements is being rapidly, effectively, and viciously killed in us. Naturally, by our long inheritance from the past, we respond to these things. Everybody responds to them when left alone.

But there is such a pressure upon us from the crowd-obsessions, spread abroad in horrid reverberation by the abuse of modern inventions, that we are never left alone. Into that margin of life which the lack of such things preserved intact for our forefathers, a perpetual current of psychic and physical vibrations keeps pouring.

To resist these recurrent tides of vulgar ideas, vulgar catchwords, vulgar emotions; to beat off this whole atmosphere of modern claptrap, a definite effort of the mind is required—parallel to the effort with which the learning of a foreign language is attended.

Alas! The old language of Nature, our familiar native tongue, has become a foreign language to us and it is necessary to learn it all over again.

Well! There is nothing rare and precious ever attained by humanity save by a Renaissance. Entirely

original out-jettings of our intellectual life-stream only occur about once in a thousand years. How in the midst of all this clamour and competition are we to attain some modicum of a renaissance of the magic of life?

The soul that is struggling to regain its birth-right, its loneliness amid the great, natural, eternal elements, is attacked in our modern days from so many sides.

Psychoanalysis has proved an infernal weapon of crowd-consciousness, a veritable engine for the breaking up of a person's dignity and privacy. These intolerable catchwords in the mouth of casual impertinence, how they encourage, by a sort of scientific Licence to Bad Manners, every little mob-group to burst in upon their neighbour's quietness, like tourists invading a cloister, "throwing up their sweaty night-caps" with indecent glee at the sight of the most sacred and secret shrines!

Here and now, in no faltering terms, it is necessary to accuse Psychoanalysis of having put into the hands of the mob a whole set of grappling-hooks for the dragging of the lonely self away from where it can be at peace with the Non-Human into a noisy vivisection-room. What Psychoanalysis does—especially in the hands of its followers—is to de-personalize the soul,

and leave it a collection of mass-production emotions, so tarnished and crude that we become like so many galvanized puppets in an erotic Punch-and-Judy show; all our passions speaking in that same harsh, high-pitched, strident shriek, which we recognize the minute we hear it!

What we really need—and what we shall have before very long—is an entirely new set of formulae for the passions of our nature; formulae, that like all scientific hypotheses, must, in their turn, yield themselves to fresher ones still.

Parallel with the commercial summons to turn away from our eternal and primordial sensations and plunge into the turgid tides of political, industrial, national controversy, Psychoanalysis insists that we subject our most sacred feelings—our feeling for Nature, for the Inanimate, for the Power behind the Universe, for Life and for Death—to its particular set of ready-made categories, its division of our soul into “conscious” and “unconscious,” into mental rationalizing on the one hand, and the dark impulses of the sea-serpent “Libido” on the other.

Let us summon back authentic philosophy! Philosophy will give us the right to live for our spiritual-sensual sensations, in absolute isolation from all these ready-made distinctions between the “inner” and the

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

“outer.” Philosophy will remind us how essentially personal and how entirely “inner” *all* our reactions to life are.

If only our mind can once acquire the wit to shake off these ephemeral cults and to lift itself up into that large, calm, luminous atmosphere where the soul is alone with the universe and alone with destiny, not only shall we be crafty enough to lie, flatter, propitiate, bow and scrape, dodge, prevaricate, equivocate, assent without assenting, agree without agreeing, and deal with Public Opinion as if we were immigrants from another planet, but we shall be able to give our individuality so formidable a reserve that neither the Freemasons of Sex nor the Know-Alls of the Unconscious, shall be able to touch us.

Armed with philosophy, as with invisible armour, we shall continue to endure and enjoy the Cosmos after our own fashion and do what we can that others may endure and enjoy it after theirs.

Nietzsche maintained the admirable opinion that all exciting and enlarging human thoughts come to their originators' heads in the process of walking. Philosophy that is worthy of the name is a walking philosophy. Now there are many subtle reasons for this. In the first place the “humours” of the body, as Burton



explains them in his "Anatomy of Melancholy," are stirred up, shaken off, dissipated, dispersed, by the movement of walking.

Then the delicate adjustment of foreground and background is the most perfect imaginable; for the foreground changes every second; while the background changes so slowly that we scarce can see it change. This is exactly what we desire in life; a ritual of human alternation in the foreground, and in the background the great planetary processions and cycles.

With a priest's instinct, with an artist's instinct, with a mystic's instinct, Nietzsche condemns the sedentary position as an accompaniment of thrilling and inspiring thought.

The animal man, that skeleton clothed upon with flesh, realizes the essence of his life best, and reduces his life to focus most easily, when he is either horizontal or perpendicular, that is to say when he is either in bed or on foot.

A life spent between the seat of a chair and the seat of a car is a monkey's life, not a man's. When you think in a seated posture you think with your rump, not with your soul. The reason why women are more profoundly life-conscious than men is because they are more often on their legs.

The magnetism of matter is a much greater aid to

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

making human thoughts luminous and penetrating than has been realized; and it is when you are walking that the magnetism of the planet's body seems to fall into unison with your own. But the real point about walking is that it isolates you in the midst of the Cosmos. It liberates you from the necessity of isolating yourself by a terrific effort of the mind.

Your whole nature can now be receptive and at peace. You can see things and people, life and death, in a large, free, easy, atmospheric perspective. You can, of course, escape from your home in your car; but your car itself is a mechanical contrivance imposed between you and Nature.

The mere physical process of walking; this putting of one leg in front of the other, this treading on the pavement, on the road, on the grass, is itself an engenderer of wise and gentle thoughts. A person cannot be too conscious of his body as he walks; of the actual sensation of movement as he stretches his legs.

By treading upon her with alternate feet you enter into a subtle and intimate relation with your mother, the earth. It is as if the earth in her deep planetary masochism got pleasure from being trodden upon, just as she does from being ploughed up.

You should feel, as you walk, something of the exultant pride with which our remote, anthropoid an-

cestors first stumbled across the astonished earth. You should revert to the old childish glory in being able to move at all in this upright manner. And in the mere process of walking a thousand mysterious understandings spring up between you and the earth which cannot reach you, though you steer your car ever so cleverly, while you are sitting above wheels.

In the process of actually touching the earth you realize what an escape from everything that hurts you worst in the world the Inanimate is. If you are the type of person for example, who has come heartily to loathe the sexual side of life—as you have a perfect right to do—you have no doubt been so miserably tormented in our sex-obsessed modern society as to have reached the point of feeling like a shameful Pariah. Your friends regard you as a fool, an ass, a nit-wit, an imbecile, a moron, a zany, a non-such; and, at the same time, as a Pecksniff, as a Tartuffe, as a Duke Angelo, as an Archbishop of Carabas; and, at the same time, as a Bestialist, as a Necrophiliast, as a smouldering Vesuvius of appalling and not-to-be-described Suppressions.

To thoroughly dislike sex as a phenomenon in this world leads to your being regarded by every Paul Pry in your neighbourhood as a perambulating abyss of unspeakable perversions. "There he goes, the sex-

hater; and, if he could, he would make a Bluebeard's Bedroom of every room he enters and a Grove of Baal of every briar-patch he crosses!"

Well, if you are the type of person who has come to loathe the Phenomenon of Sex, in the practise of walking you can get back to a primordial world of rock and stone where even the wind-tossed pollen of plants and the fluttering wings of amorous insects can scarcely follow you. Cool, clear, deep—like a granite pool going down into the infinite—the Inanimate welcomes the victims of the Great Loathing. Here the very existence of this itching, biting, stinging, tormenting, maddening trick of the creative process can be forgotten.

The Inanimate partakes of every one of those qualities that we have so long attributed to God. In the Inanimate we can lose ourselves and find ourselves as nowhere else. It is great mystery, this austere remoteness of primordial Matter; but the feelings that are stirred up by it have the power of carrying us into a level of Being where we can satisfy our life-craving without the frenzy of Eros.

How impossible it seems for men and women to avoid one extreme or the other of the pendulum's swing!

Fifty years ago the philosopher had to struggle all

his life against the narrow fanaticism of puritans who sought to suppress every free gesture of the sex-instinct; but now, at least among that large portion of the crowd that has imbibed the new fashion of thinking, the whole situation is reversed and every reaction against sex that we feel is regarded as a hopeless intellectual limitation.

What nonsense this is! Cannot these impassioned advocates of indiscriminate amorousness see the enormous power that reticence, reserve, self-control, fastidiousness, modesty, and even hatred of the sex-feeling, store up in people's natures? Sex is such a terrific force, that, like fire, or like electricity, it can be used by the magnetism of personality to the most formidable creative ends, whether used directly, or indirectly by means of suppression.

For some natures sex-excess is an excellent thing; its path being, as Blake says, the path to wisdom. But for other natures a reaction from sex is the road to enlightenment.

And the god-like reciprocity of the Inanimate answers to both these antipodal moods. One person may walk over hill and dale till contact with the elements has lifted him into a region where sex has no meaning at all. Another person may follow precisely the same

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

path and his passion for Nature may grow and grow till what he may come to feel is actually a sexual ecstasy.

The great Mother is always kinder to any eccentric offspring than are his fellow-creatures. Nature is the eternal refuge of all misfits.

No twist of the human mind, no abnormal yearning of the human spirit, no bizarre craving of the human senses, but can find some sort of inarticulate response as we put one leg in front of the other in walking over the surface of the earth. Whatever your mind and conscience have led you to be in public affairs, a conservative, a communist, an old-fashioned liberal; whatever your mind and conscience have led you to be in regard to your relations with the opposite sex; these things are but the outer framework of your life. You can be an employer of labour in a Capitalistic State; you can be a devoted proletarian in a Communist State, and if your mind is not adjusted to the influences of Nature you will still find yourself profoundly unhappy.

Cool and sweet, as to the brow of a convalescent, stir the lovely airs of morning and evening; and “though inland far we be” there are few spots so gathered about by deserts or mountains that some great winds cannot voyage across them, bringing the wild,

free breath of the salt sea. The visitations of the rain alone, that multitudinous descent of the transparent, slate-coloured water, those grey, thin heaven-high, super-Euclidian lines, that swerve and sweep and travel and yet forever must be falling as they drift, and drifting forward as they fall, the miraculous phenomenon of rain alone, so inhuman an element and yet so ancient, so historic a restorer of life, is a thing to worship.

From our scoriac ledge in the planet's surface, from our hiding-place in the wounds we have made in our mother's flesh, we look forth upon this phantom-falling sea of liquid spears, cold and transparent and grey, and we need no prophet, to come between us and this water of life.

Shut this living skeleton of a man, of a woman, oh unrighteous, social order! into your crushing four walls, into your prisons of kindless labour; as long as he can hear the rain streaming upon the window he has a living ladder of escape.

Our modern unhappiness comes from being so swamped by the crowd-consciousness that the whole essence of our personal life is lost. Sometimes it seems as if the Inanimate, so neglected by our modern gregarious consciousness, were taking today a singular revenge upon mankind.

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

No longer worshipped in their original planetary silence by solitary minds, these pre-historic forms of Matter, these rocks and stones and earth-mould, have now, in their new shapes of master-slave machines, begun to dominate our human life from quite a new angle; and modern men and women who give no thought to the elements, as they rush in their cars from their home to their work-shop, find themselves compelled all day long to wait upon iron and to serve steel, to obey the commands of stone, of marble, of cement.

Never since it built the Pyramids has humanity lived so closely in contact with great masses of the inanimate; and when we walk through the iron and stone canyons of a modern city and look up at these dizzy and towering façades, a feeling comes over us as if the mountains we have fled from, and the rocky fastnesses we have desecrated, have risen up again, like vast overpowering Frankensteins, under the work of our own hands, to reduce us to an appalling insignificance! “They shall call upon the Mountains to cover them!” is the biblical curse upon such as have lost their birthright.

Even in our modern art the same thing seems happening. There also we find this Inanimate Matter, which we have refused to contemplate in our free



hours, or to worship in our religious loneliness, gathering to itself the paramount place in all our imaginative evocations.

In modern pictures, in modern statuary, even in modern furniture, these inanimate substances, their curves and their contours, their cubic masses, their textures, their graining, their opacities and proportions, their response to light and shade, seem to have risen up, out of the very abyss, to overawe us with their mysterious qualities. It is indeed a singular phenomenon to contemplate, this revenge of the Inanimate; for the very gravel of the roads we travel over, the very sea-sands we cover with our crowds, the very mountain-recesses we rush past, the very rock-ledges we superciliously glance down at from our cars, have now invaded our art, our literature, our music—but invaded them, and that is the ironical point, not so much in the shape of something magical and lovely, but in the shape of something demonic, sinister, menacing; as if it were the litter and débris of the great cosmic quarry that we were now to be forced to admire, coming upon us, gathering against us, hypnotizing us with the motions of its iridescent dragon scales, since we have refused to drink up with our calmer spirit the large silences of its natural twilights.

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

Men and women are not as happy in their minds as they used to be; and this is because they have been led, driven, and cajoled away from the routine of those external simplicities which answer to the essential reserve and dignity of man. Men and women in these days, for all their lively gestures and shrill voices, have a troubled, hunted, harassed look in their eyes, as if this world were not their real home at all; but as if they had come from some far-off place and could not get back.

We have indeed all come from a far-off place; from that Silence within the patient bodies of women and the patient body of the earth; and we know absolutely nothing of the mystery beyond, save that it is the engenderer of this Silence.

Glimpses of sky, motions of leaves, flickerings of sunlight and shadow, voyagings of clouds, roof-edges against infinite space, it is upon these things that we fix our eyes—consciously as well as unconsciously—while we are struggling to take a grim and stoical rather than a self-pitying view of our particular tragedy. The moralists have not made nearly enough of the influence of these inanimate objects upon our human moods.

How often have these sudden feelings of melting tenderness when our nerves are wrought upon by the

elements been the prime cause of those mysterious after-thoughts that have stopped us from violent and desperate unkindness if not from crime! They have played the part of God for us at many a crisis when the words of the preachers have rung stale and hollow in our ears.

The feelings of pity, of universal forgiveness, which these things rouse in us are a miracle greater than the cosmogonic laws that bind the constellations to their path through the ether. And whence come these feelings? Not one of our philosophies explains! The pontifical uttering of the syllables "Evolution" does not help. Men of science are dumb before this mystery; and the founders of religion only emphasize what was there before them.

That there should rise up something in us when we feel the freshness of the dawn or listen to the winds of night that can dissolve our hatreds and make us see all men as tragic and pathetic figures, this must have been a very primitive phenomenon in the history of our race, a phenomenon older than Laotze or Jesus. Uncountable millions of human beings since the beginning must have felt this strange contradiction; must have seen the blundering, wrangling, blindangers of their race with the dark patience of the Inanimate.

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

The origin of Pity; who can trace it or sound it? From what fountain in the abyss does it spring? It is irrational. Reason can tell us only of Justice, of weighing merits, of rewarding the good; of punishing the evil. This strange feeling, that suddenly wells up in the heart—it is like fresh water from beneath the salt sea of our life; and it breaks all laws; it overbrims all measures; it contradicts all values of weighing and calculating.

Forgive and again forgive: pity and again pity: without limit and without end. What madness is this?

But it is from the wastes of waters that it reaches our heart. It is from the solemn march of the high stars that it melts the soul. Can pity come from the rocks and forgiveness from the wet sea-sands? Why not? Everything comes from the encounter of the Self with the Not-Self.

The Inanimate convulses our nature with feelings that reason can only look upon in stupefaction. From under the very ribs of death it shakes us with its primeval sobbing. From the beginning of time have men and women experienced these revulsions. This miracle is older than the Tao, older than the Lions and Bulls of Assyria, older than Stonehenge.

But from what crack in the scoriac earth, from what

slit in the firmament, from what rent in the pillared Cosmos, does this thing come?

It weeps for pity where life itself howls for vengeance. It forgives wrongs that call down the thunder of eternity. Can life give birth to such an anti-life? Can Nature engender such a Beyond-Nature? Out of the darkness of the Inanimate it comes, where Matter yields up the oldest of all secrets. It is nourished upon a solitude within all solitudes. It is born of a silence below all silences.

Strange are the feelings that come to us when we are alone with the earth and sky. They are feelings that contradict not only the injustice of the foolish, but the justice of the wise.

The sands of the seashore may not remember the steps that printed them, nor the stones of the roadside the feet that passed them by. The undulant tides of the air, washing back and forth, may have no knowledge of the troubled heads that their unseen presence filled with magical calm. And yet it was these things that rebuked us. It was these things that melted the heart within us.

These mute watchers utter no word; they tell no secrets. And yet it has been in converse with these that men and women have acquired a non-human

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

self-control, that they have been dissolved in a non-human pity.

All the nobler instincts of our race are born in solitude and suckled by silence. This solitude need be no far-away wilderness in Nature; this silence need be no Himalayan Peak. You stop for a second as you cross your city square and glance at the Belt of Orion. You lie awake for a while as you rest in your bed and listen to the storm; and behold! from a few simple elements belonging to that mystery which you have been brought up to call "Matter," there suddenly comes over you this reversion, this conversion, this transmutation of spirit.

Thinking of your mood later, you will say to yourself:—"I felt that while I was listening to the rain." Or you will say to yourself: "I felt that while I was out in the wind." Or you will say to your friend: "It was that walk at dusk when I got as far as the river that made me change my mind." One of the worst injuries that psychoanalysis has done to humanity is that by concentrating upon sex-suppressions it has called our attention away from the subtler and less sex-involved feelings of our life. This natural and normal stream of human consciousness—or, as I would prefer to image it, this mental mirror crossed by so many fantastical shapes—is by no means a mere meet-

ing-place of clear-cut rationalism and dark, mysterious, sinister subconsciousness. It possesses that sluggish, drowsy, simple, half-material brooding mood of so many other living creatures besides man.

Animals do not pass their time between obeying dark subconscious impulses and bright flashes of treacherous, hypocritical reason.

We have no reason for denying to the world of plants a certain slow, dim, vague, large, leisurely semi-consciousness, such as is indicated in that rough guess at their interior life summed up in the phrase "to vegetate."

Most men, and nearly all women, spend a considerable part of their conscious life, when they are not engaged in any absorbing work, in vague, brooding thoughts, that have little to do either with the rationalizing brain or with any dark "Libido." They are animal-vegetable thoughts; and they are inclined to catch hold of any little negligible incident that has recently occurred—a passing encounter, a casual conversation—and ponder ruminatively over the minutest physical aspects of this occurrence.

Now it is just this particular region of vague, brooding animal-vegetable consciousness—this region for which I have appropriated Gertrude Stein's sim-

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

ple but vivid expression “Stupid Being”—that one feels to be affected by a vague malaise.

Probably all ages have been alike in this matter. Probably there has always weighed upon average humanity, in the normal stream of their thoughts, a certain mysterious burden of sadness, of uneasiness, of unaccountable trouble.

It is hard to judge. We depend so entirely on literature for our knowledge of the past; and in literature the natural life of human beings undergoes—as we all know—very considerable changes from its living state.

But whether it is a new thing, due to our present industrial civilization, or whether it is an old inescapable doom laid upon our race from the beginning, it is clear that these normal animal-vegetable thoughts of the average human being are, as we experience them today, woefully overcast by a mysterious uneasiness and distress.

This distress, this vague discomfort, is a much more pressing, constant and normal thing than any outbursts from dark subconscious regions. We all fall into it, every day of our lives; nay! every hour of our lives. Something is wrong with the simple, normal, natural, substance of our ordinary consciousness. And before diagnosing the disease from which our normal



life suffers, it is necessary to isolate this life from all our more dramatic moments.

This isolation of the brooding, sluggish, vegetative sensuousness in our natures lends itself to a feminine genius and it is what Dorothy Richardson achieves in her series of remarkable books; books that deal far more closely with the mystery of real human consciousness than any of the psychoanalysts. Her task is to project, in original language, these fluctuating human feelings when our mind wanders from its pressing labour, from its absorbing pleasure, from its distracting worries, and broods over the essences of its surrounding impressions.

It was doubtless nothing less than an articulation of this simple mystery that Gertrude Stein aimed at in her trick of rhythmical repetition; but Dorothy Richardson goes much further than Gertrude Stein; in as much as she fills in these strange unexpressed receptivities of human consciousness not only with outlines but with warm-breathing fragrance and colour.

In the famous soliloquy of Bloom's wife at the end of "Ulysses" Joyce also deals with the same phenomenon; and indeed it would be possible to trace back this particular sensibility through Wordsworth and Rousseau to its expression in very early Mystics.

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

The images that come to us in this static sense of life are opposed to all dynamic outward action; but they remain wavering and fluctuating; for in these psychic-sensory regions everything wavers and fluctuates. And it is when we fall back upon this Static Sense of Life that we all tend just now to suffer from this particular "malaise" to which I am trying to call attention.

Probably this is no new thing. Probably from the very beginning of consciousness it has existed side by side with the vague feelings of delicious well-being that this simple, brooding, animal-vegetable condition induces. Probably it is the reverse side of some ultimate antinomy, in the primordial sensation of being alive at all, felt by every living organism.

But whatever its origin may be, it remains that in the most ordinary, natural condition of human consciousness, when we are lying back lazily and inertly upon our sense of life in its most simple state we are conscious of a certain obscure uneasiness and distress.

There is a passage in Matthew Arnold where he alludes unmistakably to that curious aspect of the Inanimate, at which I have already hinted and have taken upon myself to name "planetary expectancy." He tells us, in a poem dedicated to "Fausta" that certain "strange-scrawled rocks" and a certain "lonely

sky" he once saw in Wales seemed "rather to bear than to rejoice," seemed in fact as though they felt the weight of Something that man's outward-striving activities have made him forget.

Is it not possible that this deeply-interfused cosmic unhappiness, this "Something that infects the World" is connected with this "malaise" in our sense of life? It does indeed seem as if between this strange expectancy of "mute insensate things" and this singular "illness" in the depths of normal life-consciousness there were some queer reciprocity.

If this is so—and it often feels as if it were so—it is not only in our moods of well-being that we reach a communion with the elements. We reach it also when a nameless sadness weighs us down and we seem in our melancholy to be growing indifferent to every feeling we have, except a faint yearning to be at peace and dead.

This mysterious "malaise," if it really penetrates, as it does seem to do, the heavy substance of our day-dreaming, while some vague correspondency with it penetrates the lonely skies, and the rocky wildernesses, must be deep-rooted in life. But even if this obscure "malaise" that troubles the brooding moods of our normal feelings cannot be shaken off as a leaping fish shakes off the muddy sediment of its river; even if

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

this thing is the "Something that infects the World," it is a mistake to try and kill it by gregariousness.

We rush here and there among outward things, pushing, carrying, dragging; tying this knot, unloosening that knot, rolling stones up-hill, like Sisyphus, only to see them roll down again. We put the blame upon this person and that person; we sulk, we scold, we denounce; we burst into paroxysms of wild self-pity. "Was I not born to be happy? Was I not born to enjoy myself? Nature, Society, God—do they not owe it to me that I should have a nice life?" And all the while, there lies at the bottom of our own mind something that could so be adjusted, if we bent to the task, that we should come to share both the noble calm and the noble patience of the Inanimate.

Without any more skill, or tact, or beauty, or genius, or strength; with the same blundering wits, the same helpless hands, the same weak, feeble, inert body as we have at present, we could still confront the shocks and outrages of life with equanimity.

Yes; we must bring back philosophy; not "philosophy" in the sense of some elaborate metaphysical theory as to the "whence" and "whither" and "what," but philosophy in the sense of a working substitute for religion.

Some might say that what I am here calling "ele-

mentalism" is an austere and comfortless doctrine; and that all we do by our communion with the Inanimate is only to gather up its world-old "malaise" and thereby thicken out our normal human sorrow with the yet darker tinge of planetary fatality.

But granting that the rocky structure of our globe and the great air-gulfs around it do seem "rather to bear than to rejoice," there is no reason here for turning away from the sublime tragedy of a universe in order to waste our emotions upon vulgar inanities and contemptible banalities.

Man's deeper nature is so made that it can respond with a dark and sublime exultation to this "Something that infects the World." There is a strange excitement in feeling that we partake in the tragic burden of a whole Cosmos; and the inspiration gained by the satisfaction of our natural craving for the poetic in such things counterbalances our grim recognition of the cosmogonic "malaise."

To set ourselves to share what we divine to be the dumb endurance and blind expectancy of a whole Creation is better than playing at Twirlie Whirlie-trill in a crowded parlour.

But this is precisely where the whole attitude to life which formerly was religious, and which now—in the vanishing of religion—might be called "elemental,"

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

differs from the crowd-notions of our time. What was Religion? What was this deep, underlying, emotional mood which—from lack of interest and lack of faith—we are allowing to die out?

It was a feeling of wonder, of awe, of fearful joy, of ecstatic and rapturous contemplation, in the presence of the mystery behind what we call Nature. It was pre-eminently a grave and a solemn thing. And it was grave and solemn because the human mind, when roused to ecstatic contemplation, experiences a happiness so intense that what we call humour, gaiety, persiflage, irony, animal spirits are things that become irrelevant, troublesome, discordant.

There are two things in this world that are by nature grave and solemn almost exactly in the same way; and these things are Religion and Lust.

Religion is the life-urge concentrated upon the mystery behind life, and therefore becomes solemn; while lust is sex-desire concentrated upon some particular, exclusive, isolated, impersonal aspect of the mystery of life, and therefore becomes solemn. Laughter, gaiety, merriment, persiflage, humour, facetiousness, indicate a freedom from the intensity both of Religion and Lust.

Elementalism is a philosophy that serves as a substi-

tute for Religion; for there is enough of mystery in the Inanimate to satisfy this need. And just because it has the gravity of Religion we must not be surprised if it appears to clever, worldly-minded people to be eminently ridiculous. But its gravity partakes also of the peculiar intensity of Lust; and therefore—just as Lust does—can easily appear ridiculous to practical-minded, sober people.

Puritanism had more lust in its nature, as well as more religion, than the gay frivolous cavalier temper; and when you compare the pretty lyrics with which the latter amused itself with those sublime passages in Milton in which the cosmogonic elements of primordial Matter are rent and torn by the warring lusts of Demons and Gods, you realize what a formidable spirit dwelt in that ancient unlovely piety.

Cruelty—the only really evil thing in the world—was and is the special vice of Puritanism, the thing that forever must condemn it; but the tendency to simplify life which the puritan temper displayed, is one whose value, from the point of view of human happiness, cannot be gainsaid. It is worth remembering this; for our revulsions from the cruelties of puritanism tend to make us forget its solitary virtue.

We do not realize how the slow death of Religion

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

has taken all cosmic seriousness out of our life. Comic seriousness it seems to us today!

But if you could invent a happiness-barometer and apply it to these two human experiences, merriment at a lively gathering of friends, and a solitary walk in an unfrequented place, it is certain that the walker, even if he were as atheistical as the devil, would win triumphantly in such a contest.

The issue is absolutely clear between the orthodox crowd-opinions of our time and the spiritual rebellion against them which I am advocating.

Among the elemental presences of Nature is there anything more potent than what we name Twilight? What a thing it is, when you come seriously to note it, when you allow its magic to work upon you, this daily sinking down of darkness upon the face of the earth! Many, ere now, have sung hymns to the Sun; but it is only when twilight begins to fall that a certain largeness of the atmosphere, obliterating the transitory and ephemeral, flows around us, and lifts us up, and out and away, upon its full-brimmed tide.

Who can deny that by the feelings released in the twilight, so common, so simple, so universal, all the tenderer, wiser, gentler second-thoughts of our race are nourished and sustained?



From the populous pavements of our cities, from the bleak desolations of all those strange no-man's lands between city and country, from mountain-ridges and umbrageous valleys, from pebbled shores and tossing waters, Twilight, this faint recurrent sigh of our familiar landscape as it sinks into its diurnal sleep takes away something hard and opaque: something that separates us from the ultimate mystery.

Yes! It rolls back for us, each mortal evening, whether the weather be foul or fair, those clanging brazen gates that separate us from the calm, cool, restorative wells of life. Over our forlornest human thresholds, across the sills of our wretchedest human windows, flows this ocean of release. And under its power everything grows larger, more ethereal, more transparent. The harsh outlines recede, the crude colours withdraw, the raucous noises die down: and out of the vaporous grey upon grey an indescribable luminousness—not light, but, as it were, the spirit of light—like the blueness of fathoms of deep water, floods the exhausted world.

And the thoughts of men and women return to the moments when there has been no screen between them and the Unspeakable; no barrier between them and the withdrawingness of Matter. Like flying birds gathering homeward in the dusk, their thoughts

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

follow long, dim, moss-cool vistas of obscure feeling, avenues of emotion far too tremulous, far too vague, to be put into words.

And whence do these feelings come? From the mystery of the Inanimate; from that vast volume of the dim body of Matter against which the idealists tell us the Spirit must ceaselessly contend!

And Twilight is not only the mother of healing thoughts; it is the grand releaser from the prison of vulgarity, the great liberator from the pressure of the crowd. With whatever hot, feverish constriction the crowd-consciousness shuts us in, Twilight enables us to slip out upon the cool balconies of our own mind.

Not a solitary soul alive growing aware of that strange blueness at the window, of that undulating sea of spaciousness into which all opacities melt and lose themselves but can flee away to the ocean-banks of its own widest horizons, and keep its vigil there, listening to the breaking of the great tides. And while the eternal Twilight thus separates souls that the world has joined, it unites those that the world has separated!

This is the hour when all divided lovers send their spirits forth, each to each, across land and sea.

The man leaning against the door-post, that girl standing at the window, what has broken the laws of

space and time for these two, that their souls may rush together and be at rest? Has humanity done it? Has Christ done it? Has Spinoza done it? Not one of these! The Inanimate has done it. Matter, the old antagonist of the Spirit, the old aboriginal, elemental Titan, has come to the rescue of these lovers. What the world has joined, the Inanimate has separated. What the world has separated the Inanimate has joined.

And, finally, what is there about the Inanimate that appeals with such singular reciprocity to the noblest instincts of our race? Why should those aspects of nature where these so-called "lifeless" elements predominate—such as mountains, and the sea, and the wide air, and the desert, and the over-arching sky—have had from the earliest times such a powerful influence upon human character?

It is because all these primordial presences make up the "body" of the ultimate Cosmic Mystery without the mediation of those lower forms of consciousness to which we ourselves are nearest. The ultimate mystery lies behind all these, behind the individual bodies of plants, animals, fishes, birds and men.

But these possess what we are wont to call "souls"; whereas the only "soul"—so at least we feel—pos-

"THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD"

essed by the Inanimate is the uttermost Mystery itself!

In plain words when we are in contact with a man, or an animal, or even with a plant, a certain living consciousness in this fellow-creature separates us from the Power behind the Cosmos.

But in the case of the Inanimate we are instantaneously aware of this Power. The screen between It and ourselves is a much thinner one: and no animal-soul or vegetation-soul divides us from the divine presence.

The philosophy of Elementalism implies in the first place the cultivation of a particular kind of lonely happiness; and implies, in the second place, that this happiness is derived from certain psycho-sensuous feelings that come to us from earth, sky, sea, and air, and which can be enjoyed in the city as well as in the country; and implies in the third place that we should share with the Inanimate what might be called the cosmic tragedy.

"Is it better to give myself up, then," you will say, "to lonely broodings and solitary tragic feelings than to enjoy intelligent conversation with congenial people?" Certainly it is! For while you are jesting with your friends there comes an expression of indescribable futility and ghastly misery into your eyes;

whereas, while you are walking alone, and responding with a full heart to the wild sky above your head, your eyes, under the street-lamp, have a look of rapturous exultation.

The whole trend of our present-day ideas is pitifully wrong. It is all heading in the direction of more and more unhappiness. To tell us "to keep on smiling" as the preachers do, is enough to make us howl like the damned.

Optimistic catchwords combined with the torture of gregariousness are more than the strongest nerves can stand. All this feverish social laughter takes on a theatrical ghastliness, to an eye that has learnt to read the heart. The thing becomes a Mask of Horror, as if the anonymous corpses from the death-slabs of the Morgue were to rise up and mock and mow at us!

The only thing to do is to detach yourself at one stroke from all these agitating too-human interests. Earn your living. Stop competing and self-pitying; and live—even in the midst of all your friends—as if the streets were the Desert and you were alone with the over-arching sky.

From the old great writers of calmer ages, from the race-memories brought to us out of the air, from the ineffable essences of our own gathered-up moments of vision, there can be created, if we bend ourselves to the

“THE SOMETHING THAT INFECTS THE WORLD”

task, a magic circle around us which none of these invaders can cross. Life is too short, its sublime and tragic grandeur too deep, that we should turn from it to such bagatelles as these crowd-fashions.

It is worse than madness to be born conscious, and then to clutter up this miraculous gift with such incredible follies. Swinging upon her terrific orbit by night and by day the vast rock-structure of the earth calls upon us to share her immemorial vigil.

Horror unspeakable is never far from our thoughts; but it can be forgotten, forgotten, forgotten, as we stand—flesh-covered skeletons upon pavement-covered rock—sharing the patience of the Inanimate, enduring in stoical exultation “the Something that infects the World.”

## THE SELF AND ITS LOVES

OUR LINK WITH OTHERS...THE SECRET REVOLUTION...  
SIMPLIFY THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE...LOVE...THE TYRANNY  
OF THE HEAP...THE BED-ROCK FLOOR...THREE-QUARTERS  
OF AN HOUR

UNDOUBTEDLY there exist a certain number of persons, both men and women, whose affectional links with their fellow-creatures are so loose and casual, whose desire for solitude is so passionate and intense, that in their attitude to the cosmic situation, and in their thoughts about a possible future life, they lack the wish to associate themselves with any other living soul. But these persons, although more in number than is usually supposed, must be comparatively few.

The majority of us, however addicted to hours of absolute solitude, establish as we go through life affectional relations of one kind and another without which we would feel desolate and lost. Of these associations we are constantly aware; and the moments when we are alone would lack half their significance if it were not for the security that our link with these other persons brings. It is indeed in our

hours of solitude that we sink down into our fullest realization of what these relations really mean to us.

It is to the elements of Nature, it is to the earth and sky, that almost all lovers, and not only lovers in the narrower sexual sense but all those whose life is, as we say, "wrapped up" in other personalities, instinctively turn, when any trouble or misunderstanding arises between themselves and those they care for.

"Absence," as the proverb says, "makes the heart grow fonder," and it is for that reason that people addicted to loneliness make the faithfulest lovers and friends. The soul that has made a habit of interior solitude can withdraw, even in the presence of those it cares for most, into its secret communion with the Inanimate; and instead of this withdrawal weakening its feeling for this other one, or for these others, it increases it.

In its withdrawals from the outward it strengthens and emphasizes the inward. Aspects of their mutual life that are discordant, disturbing, fretting, fall away completely at such times; and the personality of the other limns itself in the mental vision according to its abiding "entelechy" or "platonian idea"; that is to say with all superficial and discordant qualities purged from its essential being. What is realized, in these moments of withdrawal, is the true pathos, the tragic



pathos, of these others' identities. We see them as we see them when asleep. We see them as we should see them if they were dead.

Thus when, alone with the elements, either in thought or in actual reality, we merge ourselves in those permanent aspects of the cosmic situation which have become our habitual refuge, our link with the souls we care for is not loosened but tightened.

These rarified "eidola" of the figures we have made our own accompany us in these spiritual escapes. Not further from us, because of this detachment from their immediate presence, but nearer to us do they grow! We carry them with us in our mental flight from the noises and confusions of the world. We swing them with us, out and away, these dear eidola, as we melt into the larger and more lasting background of our cluttered life.

The whole art of human existence consists in a certain drastic simplification. What makes us unhappy is not what we lack but what we possess; and when we strip ourselves and our dearest ones of all unessential possessions we grasp life in its true monumental significance.

It is indeed the natural and universal cry of the heart, this cry that declares:— "We've got each other whatever happens!" and it is when, amid the corrosive

pressure of outward possessions and outward interests, the mind grows worried and distraught that this cry is swallowed up.

One of the most vicious causes of unhappiness between people who care for each other is self-pity; and self-pity delights to enhance the pettier miseries of the body. It is for this reason that lovers should think of themselves as two tragic human skeletons fatally brought into touch against all probability, and clinging desperately together in this little island of Time and Space while the great outer tides wash backward and forward around them.

"What do you love me for?" is a question that is often bandied about between devoted amorists. "What do you find to love in me?" Surprised indeed would the other one be if the answer were—"your skeleton"! And yet how such an answer, with its noble and tragic implication of a love which alters not "when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove," would emphasize the wild, defiant undertone of all true love, defiant not merely of the obstacles of chance and accident, but defiant of those more intimate weaknesses and reactions wherein our touchy flesh and blood expresses its insatiable egotism.

Think of the number of occasions when those who care deeply and truly for each other are separated with

bitter recrimination purely because of their entanglement in the crowd! True lovers should hate the crowd. In fact it is an infallible sign that you are not "in love," in the deep unique sense, when you require the frivolities and distractions of group-life in order to be happy together.

True lovers are twin-hermits, carrying each other, in their separate imaginations, far away from the cares and amusement of the world, into those solitary places between land and sea, between earth and sky, alone with the clouds and the winds and the far-off constellations, where they can emphasize their division from the rest of their race.

One very curious sign of an authentic love-affair is the tendency to instinctively dilate upon the feeling that they have "met before in another incarnation." This may well be an illusion. It matters not! What it really implies is an attitude that would remain just the same if it could be proved once for all—which it never can be—that there is no life before birth or after death. The implication is that the lonely, separate ego, now finding its "alter-ego," has its basic individuality quite independently of the human era, and even of the human race into which it has chanced to be thrust.

Carrying its true-love with it, imbedded in a niche in

its being, as the "moss" is embedded in the hard transparency of a moss-agate, the lonely ego plunges into the vast ocean of the Inanimate, below whose impenetrable sea-floor lies the Mystery it can never fathom.

To philosophize at all means that in proportion as your thought sinks deep into life you feel yourself to be a stranger and a sojourner in this particular human civilization. Humanity has given you much; has given you your food, your language, your clothes, your protection. And you "return these duties back, as is most fit."

But humanity did not give you your separate independent identity, any more than it gave such an identity to a forest-tree, to a chipmunk, to a sparrow-hawk, to a jelly-fish, to "a sea-shouldering whale." Your identity is your own; and the grand prerogative of your identity is that it can feel this surprised detachment from the whole stream of planetary life, as it looks about it, arbitrarily selecting its own particular universe of contemplation.

"So this is how things are in this dimension of Being," it can say to itself. "And for my part I shall worship the Inanimate." The dearer your human loves are to you, the further you can detach yourself from them and see them in the monumental and

static perspective of those who are asleep or dead! Tragic and beautiful—the superficial irritations all smoothed away—do their figures then limn themselves before us. An infinite tenderness flows over us as in calm relief against the vast non-human background these human forms, so fatally linked with us, appear. Death, itself, by means of our constant brooding upon the pathos of life, as seen against such a background, grows less devastating, though more solemn and more tragic.

Suddenly, in the midst of the voices of the crowd, as you feel yourself and those you care for carried along upon the surface of the earth in its planetary voyage, you find you are staring at the ground beneath your feet, at a heap of stone in front of you, and something enduring in the heart of the Transitory, something permanent in the heart of the Flowing, touches each human "Imago" that you have come to love, until like a shape of marble, rising out of a tide that is washing all away, its lineaments gather to themselves an expression that belongs to this projection of the eternal; and their weaknesses and your own weakness—causes of all the irritations between you—vanish like drifting foam.

The hour is at hand when an immense number of

men and women in all the countries of the world will revolt—secretly, passionately, obstinately—against the crowd-opinions that have turned man's heart away from its rightful world and made it a slave of the unessential. The hour is at hand when thousands and thousands of men and women will recognize that the utmost all the Governments, all the Revolutions and Reactions, all the economic upheavals and improvements can do, is to supply them with a minimum of livelihood, a minimum of security and peace, a minimum of labour and its reward.

Let the revolutionaries and reactionaries, let science and machinery give us our bare living, our bare security against famine, our bare peace of mind, and they have done enough. Their States and their State-Upheavals, their Politics and Economics, their Inventions and Industries, are but means whereby men and women can enjoy the few years of harmless happiness that intervene between the two great Silences, between the eternal Un-born and the eternal Dead.

It is a strange madness to lay the life-stress upon anything less significant, less mysterious than life itself. By all means let the whole world be organized into one great Productive Machine, into one great Productive Economic State. By all means let us each labour, like obedient slaves, for this World-Organization, for

four or five hours every day, and receive, as our return, food, shelter and freedom from panic. But for the rest, the important thing is not external at all, not social or gregarious at all, not necessarily human even. The important thing is how, as individual solitary spirits, who might have been born on Uranus or Saturn rather than upon the earth, we are going to strengthen, deepen, intensify our ecstatic happiness in life and our philosophic acceptance of death.

Inventions as a means to an end, machinery as a means to an end, Governments, Economics, Revolutions, all as means to an end, let them do their work, fall into their places, and be put out of our minds.

"Production for satisfaction and not for profit" is the word; but there is another word too— "Work to walk; or work to earn your right to be alone."

It is extraordinary how deeply these corrupting crowd-notions have got into our heads. The idea of what is called "Success" for example, which only means the idea of being heard of by people who have no more notion of real merit, of real dignity, of real grandeur of character than they have of real happiness. What an impoverished, pinchbeck sort of ambition that is!

And it is all this outward struggle, this mean, contemptible, wretched struggle, to be heard of, to get

power, that blights our life. How could the great Nietzsche not see, how can Spengler not see, that this Will to Power of theirs is after all a poor, base, ignoble thing? They are blinded—these noble poets—by a childish megalomania!

Yes, it is a grandiose perversion of vicarious vain-glory, this cult of the predatory and the raptorial. Many quiet, harmless, poetical, bookish men have got it into their heads, by a sort of pathological masochism, that they must tap their foreheads on the ground in front of great, thundering dictatorial tyrants, and in front of all prey-seizing carnivores.

They "put it over us" with their eagles and their lions! As a matter of fact the real lion—a very harmless beast—eats to satisfy its hunger and then grows amiable, drowsy, peaceful.

They would have done much better—and the theatrical sensationalism of their ideal would have been much plainer to all—had they chosen some savage fish as their ideal, or even some ferocious bacillus. For what nonsense it is to pretend that a prowling cat—for example—pouncing upon a skylark is a more noble product of the life-force than a great, placid, deep-uddered cow, browsing in the grass!

And how absurd to pretend that the majestic, ironical, imperturbable, plebeian Socrates is an inferior



product of Nature to the Nietzschean and Spenglerian Alcibiades with his cloudy aristocratic beauty and his sulky-pouting Will to Power!

The majestic, slow-moving cow—worshipped by the Egyptians, the oldest of all civilizations and the one with the strongest mania for permanence—why should it be regarded as inferior to the “burning-bright” tiger of the jungle?

Force, strength, violence, swiftness—even in Homer the most moving passages are not about these things; they are about that very contemplation of individual human beings regarded statically against their inanimate background and regarded in stripped and statuesque simplicity against that background, which we are now considering. We ought to ponder on the old Chinese Tao, to put such things in their proper place.

Our unhappiness comes from living in public, from living in groups, in crowds, in “gangs.” In that Golden Age, of which Rousseau had a vague, instinctive inkling, when peaceful, lonely, frugiferous families—before tribal warfare began—wandered about over the face of the earth in paradisiac harmlessness there was not even an Homeric competition for “kudos.”

What could you do best, O youth, O maid, for the

human race today? Simplify your individual life, until it becomes a microcosmic epitome of that far-off Golden Age! Simplify your desires till you enjoy with sacramental ecstasy every single physical sensation you have. Simplify your exactions from other personalities till you enjoy your loves without making all these self-pitying, whimpering, scolding, aggravating claims upon them. It is not only your own happiness that will come to you from this solitary, stoical, detached attitude to the alien lives linked so closely with your own.

This whole secret movement, in favour of a contemplative, spiritual anarchism, is no mere return to a life of sensation against a life of action. It is a sinking back upon the one thing, in this brief moment of Being between two impenetrable Silences, which possesses an authentic and majestic grandeur worthy of the noblest traditions of our race.

To struggle for power over the crowd is not a noble or a dignified thing or a thing worthy of real greatness. You have to make too many sacrifices. No man can keep his interior respect and deal with the crowd. All rulers who really rule—except the lucky ones who can hide themselves—become the slaves of their own tricks and the victims of their own despotism. They take the souls from their people, so that their people cannot "call their souls their own"; but before they die

they find that the people have taken the soul out of them and left no comfortable automatons behind.

What is the purpose of life? A certain particular kind of happiness; the kind of happiness that arises from life like a refreshing dew, when you have fought long enough for it. Everyone who feels it communicates it like an invisible aura. It is the blessedness of the saints; it is the rapture of the mystics; it is the ecstasy of newly-impassioned lovers.

But above all it is that thrilling, dissolving and melting joy that trembles through the veins of the humblest and least intelligent among us, when, even for a few minutes, we give up competition and ambition and reputation! This feeling, this rapture, this blessedness, is its own entire self-justification. Whenever it flows through us we know that merely for such a feeling as this to exist in the world is more important than the victories of Caesar.

For a very strange intuition accompanies this ecstasy when it is thus brought about by the deliberate simplification of our life; the intuition, namely, that there is some great process at work which realizes the acme of creation, the entelechy of the whole life-struggle, in these large, cool plant-leaves of magic ecstasy, opening and quivering in the invisible air. This it is that makes us turn to our human loves from these

sacred moments with the feeling that we are seeing them as we never saw them before; seeing them as more beautiful, as more tragic, as less, O far less, responsible for their mortal weaknesses than in our self-pitying exactions we imagined them to be.

Yes; what is continually ruining our happiness with the figures we love is the intrusion of other people. Wise, yea! ten-thousand times wiser than the rest, are the lovers, with or without offspring, who keep the crowd—friends, acquaintances, all—away from their threshold.

Simplify! Simplify! That is the escape from our present imbroglio. The whole misery of it comes from refusing to see that all this mass-production is only a means to an end; only a means to a more simplified, a more elemental, a less cluttered routine of life for the individual. Let the bread-winner make his daily plunge into the vortex of mass-production, and then return to life; return to a rigidly exclusive life, with his mate, with his offspring, with himself!

It is nonsense to speak of "love" as something that comes and goes beyond our control. Love comes beyond our control just as our birth into life comes; but, once with us, love, like life, is a thing we can deal

with, strengthen, deepen, intensify—by our imaginative will—and prolong *ad infinitum*.

That is the worst of all these popular psychoanalytical doctrines that float about. They create an atmosphere of fatalism, of fatal defeatism, in which the majestic and magical power of the will is completely disintegrated. Let the accident of propinquity bring us our mate; once ours, we are poor magicians if we cannot ward off the crowd, and, when once we have won our minimum livelihood, give up completely all this insensate competition and concentrate on the exciting deepening of our "love."

Into the four letters of this fatal monosyllable humanity has poured so much of its wisdom and so much of its cruelty that another word is required for what the imaginative will can do when it has cleared the ground for its task. Neither the old ideal unselfishness, nor the new Lawrence-cult of the "dark gods" dwelling below the human waist, supplies us with what we need.

Our true-love should be treated as we treat the Elements, as we treat the Inanimate; that is to say, we should turn upon the tragic mystery of his—of her—identity that calm, deliberate, ecstatic contemplation that outlasts all passion.

It is just here that our habitual worship of the In-

animate, realized Sub Specie Temporis et Aeternitatis, stands us in such good stead.

Fetish-worshippers, idolators, we must be, discounting all the nervous irritations of the surface, and holding fast to the essential mystery. This after-love, which has not yet been named, is neither an unselfish renunciation nor a predatory passion. It is the art of creative contemplation. There is the same cosmic lust in it as when we fling our spirit into the Inanimate.

The present writer saw a strange sight yesterday morning. Standing on a stone in a rapid river he watched with fascinated sympathy what really looked uncommonly like an ant-suicide. Reaching this stone by means of a long drooping rush-blade, two ants conversed together, after their manner, with signs and signals, and then, after a stoical and brief farewell, one of them hurried up the rush-blade, obedient as a good soldier, to convey the news to the Heap, while the other deliberately rushed into the whirling water and was washed away in a second out of all sight.

This interesting appearance of elemental intelligence, even in an Ant-Heap, set the writer meditating upon the human suicides we read about every day. These also rush into the Jordan, from gas-stoves, from high windows, from platforms, from bath-rooms,

from offices, from first-class decks. And they rush into it to escape—just as this suicidal ant appeared to do—the intolerable tyranny of the Heap.

What these victims of despair are debarred from recognizing is that what is called the Eternal culminates at every moment. At every moment all this shifting and flowing panorama crystallizes itself not only into ghastly reefs of anguish, but into lovely floating shapes that are as it were islands of infinity in the rushing sea of time. To isolate these moments, to arrest them and hold them and fuse our spirit with them is the real purpose of life.

For a consciousness that is forever aware of the magical response to the craving of the human soul supplied by the sanctuary of the Inanimate, the most exciting feelings are those that flow from our contact with the planet upon which we live. With so much of her surface covered by the motionless fertility of vegetation, with a yet larger portion covered by the moving desolation of the oceans, our Earth still remains an immense mineral body. Bathed in elemental air, washed by elemental water, fertilized and scoriated by the fires of the sun, this huge revolving Inanimate that gave us birth responds more than we guess to the

solitary consciousnesses that brood upon her planetary being.

How can we be so narrow-minded in our obstinate anthropological jealousy as to deny any sort of conscious life to the great mother of all the life we know? The self and its loves—yes! But what of the self and its mysterious non-human parent? If the strange calm, that comes to us when we fling our spirit into the elements, brings an indescribable inspiration, felt as much in the city as in the country, why should we think of this inspiration as a cosmic phenomenon, dependent on cosmic consciousness, in place of a planetary phenomenon, dependent on planetary consciousness?

To use the grandiose expression "the purpose of life" is out of place when every separate living thing is driven on by a peculiar urge of its own, not quite identical, as even gardeners know, with any other; but if you ask the question why should this outflowing of the human spirit into the planetary life be a consummation more desirable than any other human gesture, the answer is threefold:—"Because it is the only gesture of the human soul which, while entirely harmless, satisfies the whole of our being; because it is the only gesture which is possible to all souls everywhere and at all times; and because it is the only one that is common to all."



What, in fact, we do when we concentrate upon this movement of our nature rather than upon any other is to simplify our conscious life to the extreme limit. Infants stretch out their whole tactile awareness towards what surrounds them; and by a final analysis of our conscious life—when it is stripped of all accessories—we find in ourselves, behind and below every other feeling, this feeling of the self encountering the not-self.

Of what use is philosophy if it does not make it easy and natural for us to sink back into this primordial duality, wherein consciousness faces its opposite, faces what Hegel calls its "otherness," and communes with it, in naked, complementary reciprocity? The value of philosophy is that it should lead us back, backwards and inwards and downwards, till we stand upon the bed-rock floor of our experience of life. And the bed-rock floor of everyone's experience of life—beyond which it is impossible to sink further—is when the "I am I" confronts that universe of resistance which we call "Matter," out of the midst of which there keep beckoning and gesticulating to us those other selves that we assume to be self-conscious even as we are.

The self and its loves? But how few of us make it the habit of our life to strain our spirit, and fling it

forth again and again, into conscious contact with the planetary body of the earth!

So far in the wrong direction have the crowd-values moved, that if you told an average modern person that the purpose of your life was a communion between your consciousness and the earth's consciousness, he would think you had simply gone mad. And yet if you told him that the aim of your life was a communion with God he would accept your statement as quite a normal one—normal save for the usual, secret, human reservation, that you were a hypocrite and a liar.

Come! Let us bring this matter down to the most practical reality! You are in your rooming-house, or apartment-house, as the case may be, in Detroit, in Des Moines, in San Antonio, in Seattle. Your family, for the moment, is out, or is happily occupied, and your own work for the moment is over. You look at the clock. Yes! you have half-an-hour entirely at your disposal before any living human soul has any claim on you again.

This is your opportunity; and you seize it with avidity. You leave the house; you walk along the quietest pavement in your neighbourhood. You make your way towards some particular park-railings or towards a church-yard that contains a patch of grass.

Every step of this way is familiar to you, for not a day passes, wet or fine, but you manage by crafty plotting to steal this unequalled half-hour from the service—or the tyranny—of your fellow-creatures. Yes! every step, and every rough curb-stone and every uneven brick, and every queerly-marked piece of pavement is exquisitely dear and sacred to you; for they are the milestones of your escape from civilization, your escape from machinery, from advertisements, from automobiles, from the radio, from the *Vox Humana*, from all Modern Improvements.

As you walk along—with your eyes on the ground—you think of the whole strange rondure of this terra-queous globe and the spirit within you voyages with it through immeasurable space. It is twilight perhaps; and all around you there is that indescribable blue light which, like the blue robe of the Mother of God, the city wears at this season and this hour. But you still keep your eyes upon the ground; for you can feel the presence of that blue light in a certain mystical taste.

There is an indescribable sadness in this air as you breathe it in, as of a lingering incense in a vast empty temple; for the Autumn is beginning, though it is still only August. But this sadness is far sweeter to you than all the gaieties of all the places of pleasure in the

world! This air which you taste in your mouth is indeed the very atmosphere of the earth, and into it have passed all the subtle, gentle thoughts of the men and women of the old time who in their day slipped out, just as you have done, to get a breath of air after their day's work!

Work, work, work! Thus do the days of the years of our life pass by. But it is this daily half-hour—our very own out of all the rest—that makes it worth it to us that we were born at all.

And as we walk on, avoiding the people and still staring at the ground, the mute expectancy of all this vast mass of mineral substance beneath us, all this "thick rotundity" of Inanimateness between us and our antipodes, steals over us like a spell. Can it be that this huge mineral body—covered with its green pastures, its grey seas, its yellow deserts, its white mountain-ridges, and now with this strange blue light—is absolutely devoid of anything corresponding to what in us is consciousness?

And as we think of this—as we have done every day for the last five, ten, fifteen years!—the rare ecstasy we are always seeking begins slowly to tremble through our being. Is it—can it be—the response of all this vast orbic volume of Not-Self to the cravings and longings and fumbings of the Self, this quivering ecstasy that trembles through us?

But we have reached our railings now, and it is time—more than time—to retrace our steps. We have stolen three-quarters-of-an-hour from Human Society! As we walk back, the rapture slowly dies down and another thought—quite as habitual with us as those that led to that feeling—takes possession of us. And in the deepening blue light, now growing like the light of some tremulous Will-o'-the-Wisp City of a land of Mirage it comes over us that the whole of this huge cosmic panorama—for we have lifted up our eyes and caught sight of the early stars—is merely one Dimension of Being out of countless others; a Dimension real enough in its own nature but only a threshold to much more.

As this thought formulates itself within us a curious sensation—parallel with this thought—begins to possess us. And we experience the feeling—it is infinitely far-off and faint but it is quite sharp and distinct too—that a portion of our mind, an inviolable, indestructible portion, is outside all this whole burden of Time and Space; yes! outside this whole astronomical universe.

This feeling does not take possession of us with any emotional perturbation. It is quiet, calm, detached, super-rational. But when it has gone—and it leaves us, as it has done nearly every day for the last ten

years, at the door of our house—we feel that somewhere in this vast, elemental Silence—felt so acutely the second we are alone and felt in spite of the immediate uproar—is a clue, the stretched-out tension of a vibrant hint, that, if only we could grasp and hold it for one-thousandth flicker of an eyelid, would reassure us about our loves, reassure us about our dead, reassure us about the tragic, unpardonable pain at the heart of all flesh. But no; it is gone again; gone as it has always gone before!

But as we mount our stairs, returning wearily enough to our practical thoughts, something clings to us still from our escape into the Inanimate. Something clings to us still from this brief moment alone on the bare deck of the voyaging ship. With the nerve-jangling noises round us again; and the ghastly glee of human beings—inheritors of the high, penetrating thoughts, the subtle feelings, the recondite learning of ten thousand years—in their unbelievable megalopolitan vulgarities, evoking a sort of lurid fascination, we have the power now to retreat into ourselves without the black bile of malignant and unholy hatred.

After all, according to the Jesus-Tao-Rousseau doctrine—that great, secret wisdom flowing like pure water underground—their souls and our soul are in real truth equal.

## THE SELF AND THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE

A "FORMULA"...THINKING OF OUR SKELETONS...WHAT  
CAN "ELEMENTALISM" DO FOR YOU?...OUR WICKEDNESS  
...THE CONTEMPT OF FATE...SIMPLIFYING HAPPINESS...  
THE ART OF SELF-TRANSMUTATION...THE MIND AS A  
MAGICIAN

THE only justification I have for naming the way of thinking and feeling that I am trying to isolate and clarify here by so ponderous an appellation as "Elementalism" is that it implies a certain particular attitude towards these non-human aspects of our planetary environment which in common parlance are called the "Elements."

Lift up your hand! It is upon this miracle that the whole of civilization depends. Lift up your heart! It is upon this miracle that the whole of philosophy depends.

Let us bring this thing down, as people say, to bed-rock. Philosophy is of no avail until it becomes something very definite and very tangible; until it gives you

a symbol, in fact, that you can hold palpably before you.

This is the crux of the matter. Our philosophy must reduce itself and narrow itself down to a formula that is much more than a formula; that is much more, in fact, than a rational act. It must be a formula that holds the clue to a psychic act, a mental act, a volitional act, a creative act, an act wherein the ego shares the primeval creative energy of the First Cause.

Every attempt at philosophizing implies a struggle to satisfy the craving of something in us that no longer finds what it wants. This is the origin of all genuine philosophies. Spinoza tells us that his philosophy began in a search for something permanent and unchanging towards which he could direct his love.

What it seems to me we need now—if the tendency of thought that I am trying to articulate has any value at all—is a clear, palpable, tangible “formula” that is also a living and a creative act.

At every crisis, when we are harassed, driven, hunted, persecuted, thoroughly confused, miserably humiliated, we need some significant mental image that we can resort to quickly and decisively, some image that is at once a gesture and an idea, some image that is at once a mental picture and a challenge to a



psychological effort, some image that is in fact already a psychological effort.

Such a formula, such an image-gesture, we may find in the realization of our consciousness as an indwelling power holding the body in its control, using the senses of the body to its own purpose.

To enhance this image-gesture and make it more effective, nothing could be better than to think of our body—thus dominated by our mind—as in the form, which in all probability it will eventually take, of a skeleton.

In this thinking of our body as a skeleton, made to gesticulate and move about and patiently endure many evils, there will be attained a wonderfully close relationship with the elements.

Indeed if the train of thought indicated in this book has any cogency at all, it will soon become apparent why the best of all image-gestures for the secret ritual of our days would be a skeleton moved about by an invisible spirit. Such an image-gesture ought soon to turn into a definite sensation, under the stress of which you will feel yourself hovering about this skeleton like an invisible spiritual presence.

Such a presence neither lies down, nor gets up, as it makes the skeleton do, but is always there, hovering

about this skeleton-shape, so thickly clothed upon by flesh, commanding it to do this or to do that; or to refrain from doing this or that.

Not all the combined disintegrations of the human ego by modern psychology can alter the fact that from the beginning of consciousness man has been aware of an interior or overshadowing identity that has the power of saying "I am I" and which dominates the body's motions.

"Lift up your hand!" and the body obeys. "Lift up your heart!" and the vital spirits of the body rush to obey.

Thus the obscure mental image of mind and body which underlies all our personal life precipitates itself into a perfectly clear and definite feeling, which can be isolated from all our other feelings and intensified by habit.

But why think of your body as a skeleton in place of what it appears to yourself and to others? For a deep psychological reason; for which we can find many precedents in history. The old Stoics who were, so to speak, priests of the art of character, always spoke of the conscious soul as carrying about a corpse.

In ancient mediaeval pictures a certain awareness of the skull—that familiar and inescapable adjunct of Homo Sapiens—indicates the same tragic symbolism.

When our body is fretted with discomfort and our nerves are jangled; when in our flesh we groan under pain; when a sickening weariness weighs down all the buoyancy of our senses; it is then that to think of the soul as independent of the body, it is then that to feel the "I am I" as a living entity carrying a skeleton about with it, becomes a curious comfort. And it becomes a comfort because this image is double-edged. On the one hand—in the skeleton—it represents the grimness of our endurance. On the other hand—in the soul—it represents the triumph of our enjoyment.

We indeed use here the same sort of subtle psychological ascesis practised by the old mediaeval religionists and by the old stoical philosophers, which made them both so formidable to endure the world and so sensitive to enjoy the Beatific Vision.

The mistake our generation has made is to throw away all the deep wisdom of these subtle habits of feeling just because we can no longer believe in the questionable theology that accompanied them.

Nothing is more preposterous in the crowd-consciousness of our time than a certain sham "paganism" that advocates ways of life totally alien to everything that is most subtle, most dignified, most intellectual, most beautiful in our inherited tradition.

This sham "paganism" is certainly not Homeric.

The crafty Odysseus—the darling of Pallas Athene—if he visited our shores and observed our habits, would drag his much-enduring companions away by force from our corrupting society even as he did from that of the Lotus-Eaters!

You cannot throw away all the old dualism between soul and body which has been a tradition of faith and a habit of feeling for ten thousand years without falling into every sort of nervous malady, into every sort of unhappiness, into every sort of despairing futility.

It is no use saying that modern Scientists have totally given up the use of the word "soul." They may have given up the word. They cannot help making use of the thing. The truth is that humanity's belief in the soul through such vast aeons of time is enough to have half-created the soul. This indeed is the whole point! Perhaps it has half-created it; and even now the crowd-consciousness of our age is engaged in trying to destroy what the anonymous generations have almost succeeded in creating.

But whether we have created it or not, whether we ever will create it or not, the fact remains that we have the feeling of an "I am I" within us which can command the body, and upon the basis of this feeling is

founded the way of life, isolated here and indicated by the name "elementalism."

By thinking of the body as a skeleton, in place of something plump and handsome, the "I am I" within us is encouraged to struggle to free itself more and more from flesh and blood, thus fulfilling the intention of that magical urge in living things, that goes by the name of Evolution, and which is forever striving towards a condition of Being at present unthinkable. And the freedom and individuality, as a nucleus of life, which the self has been slowly acquiring for a million years, grows imperceptibly more emphatic the more it is able to dominate its body.

A skeleton is a thing of bone; and bone divorced from flesh has a close affinity with that rocky structure which is the skeleton of our planet. It is an inanimate substance, this bone of our naked frame, and it is stark with primordial inanimate fatality.

It was a wise and a deeply significant trick of mediaeval mystics to make so much of the human skeleton in their symbolic contemplations; for although the Church cries over her dead "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," the bones of a man, free of the mummeries of the embalmer, can outlast the walls of his cities. Lodged between the ribs of the earth they have outstayed the perpetuity of divinity; and the indistin-



guishable ashes of the most ancient altars are but an anonymous bed for these more lasting memorials.

"This is the skull of a man" cry the unearthers of forgotten empires; and among the petrified relics of prehistoric piety man-bone confronts mammoth-bone. The memories of forgotten hierarchies of spacious immortality whirl up and sink down, about them, with every wind that blows; but a skull is more lasting than any theology; and one man's bones will outlive a dozen systems of philosophy.

Let me suppose, O reader, that you are now, even as you slip this small book from your pocket and glance, bitterly and unhappily, it may be, at this very page, seated in an office that you loathe, or standing in a work-shop, or a factory, or a city-store. Or let us suppose that your work is over for the day, and that you are seated with a group of gregarious-minded people in porch or parlour or on lodging-house steps. Each one of these people may be as miserable as you are, may be as teased and tortured as you are; but certainly as you look at their faces there is no sign of this! All you can see is that particular look of drugged acquiescence, mingled with hysterical cleverness, which is the normal crowd-conscious human look.

Very well! You are now longing to escape from all this, to escape from every condition of this life of yours, with a craving that is growing desperate and dangerous.

Be not vexed with me, O reader, if I enlarge my speculations a little further still and implore you to pretend that you are a cynical, disillusioned, not very successful man of letters . . . in plain words a deboshed and life-defeated Intellectual, staring in front of you with a heart turned to corpse-cold cinders, from the couch where you sit, your glass of gin upon your knee.

Now let us see what this somewhat stark philosophy of "elementalism" can do for a person in your present position. But first of all—to get things into perspective—let us see what comfort you could get out of a few of the older philosophies.

That tantalizing Absolute of Hegel's for instance—that old, wily sea-serpent of reconciled contradictions, of sublimated antinomies, of transmuted opposites, that old, crafty World-Snake, that spits out of its belly, in the finale, such an extremely rational and even commonplace acceptance of the Status Quo, how would that help you at this juncture? What would your knowledge of the logical regression of those backward-working conjuring-tricks, by which, out of such

empty abstractions as Being and Not-Being, the rich-teeming multiplicity of Nature is finally plucked forth—as though out of a magician's pocket—really do to help you to escape the intolerable flippancy, the exasperating complacency, the drunken self-pity of the crowd-minded?

Or to take another and a yet more famous philosophy, what would that super-mundane, super-divine Dimension of pure transmuted Platonic Ideas be to a person situated as you are now at this very moment, hemmed in by machinery, pounded at by vulgarity, pestered and bated and hunted by domestic chatter, sickened by erotic back-chat, withered and wilted by economic shop-talk?

And yet you know perfectly well that domestic maliciousness, pornographical scavenging, political chicanery, industrial economy, are not what make a living human soul radiantly happy. You know perfectly well that from these things something emanates that has to be forgotten before the universe can pour its magic through our senses.

Why is it, knowing that something is so horribly wrong, that you draw back from the mere thought of Plato, as if so poetic an idealist would be only a bitter and ironical mockery to you at a juncture like this? Or the trumpet-toned exhortations of Nietzsche's "Zara-



thustra"—how would they sound in this environment? Certainly a great deal more to the point than Plato or Hegel; but when it comes to your real actual feelings in these crowded places such sublimely-muted tensions between starlight and nothingness seem to leave "the pathos of difference" so pitiaibly unbridged that they put no weapon into the hand of anyone who is not by nature a Higher Man.

But apart from Nietzsche, who is the most misunderstood of all philosophers, and like all the greatest thinkers is more of a poet than a thinker, what small comfort are these vast metaphysical systems to anyone who is being tortured in his nerves by the gregarious bullying of his family, his fellows, his companions?

Well! What would this particular habit of the mind that I am tempted to call by the grandiose name of Elementalism do for the strengthening and sustaining of a forlorn human soul, landed in a crowded office, a stuffy parlour, a desolate bedroom, a garish store, or on some artistic studio-couch in the midst of a group of neo-pagans?

In the first place this stoical "philosophy of solitude," that I have come to think of as Elementalism, finds a vent and an outlet for all the wickedness of our ordinary human nature, with the single exception

of cruelty. Cruelty must be ruled out because of its association with that mood of sadistic insanity which is humanity's most horrible inheritance from the First Cause. But with the exception of cruelty we have a right to throw all our wickedness into our philosophy.

It is indeed because the great Metaphysicians were so naturally good that their philosophy touches us so little.

What we need, if we are really to endure and enjoy the Cosmos, is a habit of thought that is a habit of war. We must get our malice into our attitude to life and our wicked belligerency into our world-feeling. Our happiness is not something that is easily drifted into, in a relaxed and passive acceptance of the Universe. It is on the contrary something that has to be struggled after, obtained with effort, won and held by a series of constant battles. These are battles with the First Cause, with Nature, with human beings, and with our own insanities.

The fact that in the uttermost abysses of life we have to fight for our liberty, the fact that in the remotest recesses of Being we have to wrestle with the First Cause, even as Prometheus struggled against Zeus, and Jacob contended with the Angel, are the dark and sinister aspects of every true philosophy that

render the appeal of any purely idealistic system so cold and faint and formal.

We must philosophize with our malice. We must be as gods, selecting and rejecting. To accept the Cosmos in its entirety is the gesture of a slave, not of a man. Thus when our loneliness is invaded and the magical silence in which every spirit has a right to live is impinged upon by the crowd there is a wonderful comfort to be derived by stripping ourselves, not only of our clothes but of our flesh and blood, until there is nothing for them to torment but a forked, straddling skeleton and a skull that may be held in human hands a thousand years hence!

It is also a wonderful comfort to think away the walls and the roofs of the buildings and to feel oneself as a naked image of the perpetuity of the Inanimate under the far-off stars. It is a vast solace to think of the huge rondure of the terraqueous earth beneath our skeleton feet, how it is forever carrying us forward with its luminous and its darkened atmosphere, like a great, dim, soft projectile, through inter-stellar space.

All this is no more than a clear, stark envisaging of the actual Cosmic Situation around us, that Situation which in beautiful and terrible earnest is a substitute for God. And by thus piercing through the

outward appearance of things, the human faces around us, the man-made machines about us, all the frippery and tinsel, all the competition and clutter, all the tumult of the crowd-voices, all the pain in our own flesh, all the futility in our own weariness, a great invigorating breath, cold and austere, full of the obliviousness of space and the obliterations of time, lifts us up above the hubbub, up and out and away above the hurly, into that tragic-beautiful trance, wherein the Inanimate waits—dumb, terrible, enduring—the breaking up of the whole monstrous Shadow-Play!

"Wait! Wait! Wait!" is what the muted voices of that ultimate Silence are forever murmuring; and it is when the lonely conscious Self by its imaginative will isolates its difference from Matter, and reduces its own body to the bleakest and starkest form of Matter, that the sovereign authority of mind can share this "Waiting" of its terrific Anti-Self. Then, in that vast hush, between the horns of the ultimate duality, the conscious Self feels the impinging Not-Self to be dependent upon its will, its will to differentiate, its will to obliterate, its will to select, its will to forget.

That tyrannical imperative within us that issues the command that we must accept the Cosmos in its totality is one of those "hang-overs" from early religious

mandates that must be eradicated. It is not imperative upon us to accept the universe in *status quo*.

It is our essential right as independent personalities to play the part of magicians, and to create and destroy this impinging Not-Self from the very start. By "creating" is meant the contemplative brooding which gives permanence and solidity; and by "destruction" is meant the annihilation by forgetting which is the ego's supreme weapon.

"Wait! Wait! Wait!" is the word whispered to us out of the Silence. Metaphysicians will have it that this apparently irreducible Matter around us, even stripped to its simplest elements, even thinned down to those hypothetical energies and vibrations of which modern Science speaks, is essentially unreal.

It is at any rate "real" enough as a constant impression and an inalienable experience of all consciousness.

The habit of mind to which I have given the name of "Elementalism" refuses to follow the metaphysicians in denying reality to Matter. On the contrary such a habit of thought emphasizes the impassable gulf between Matter and Consciousness; a gulf that must ever remain unbridgeable, however much modern science can thin Matter out, into electrons, nuclei,

quanta, "events"; while the mind borrows from its *other* its stoical waiting.

Waiting for what? Here the earth under our feet is silent; and the sky over our heads is silent; and the immense amplitude of space is silent. Real enough—for it is an inescapable experience—is this material world; but something in our consciousness, something that is a portion of our inmost ego feels itself to be in touch with unknown levels of life that are behind the astronomical universe.

"Real" while it lasts, but a monstrous Shadow-Play, that eventually is destined to dissolve, allowing that Unknown behind it to take its place, and to become, in its turn, the "Real" of a new order, of a new universe of awareness! "Real" while it lasts. But—

*"The great globe itself,  
"Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
"And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
"Leave not a rack behind!"*

Nietzsche, followed by Spengler, delights in emphasizing the life-hunt of strong, raptorial, predatory personalities; and in pursuance of this life-greed, the Status Quo of the universe, this biting, scratching, poisoning, caressing multiplicity of impressions that

makes up the self's present awareness of the Not-Self is laid upon us as something that must be accepted with an exultant joy.

But why must it be accepted? Granting the great Heraclitean assumption, which of course both Nietzsche and Spengler revel in, that all life is war, why should not we give this "war" a new twist, a new orientation, and turn it from a struggle to accept into a struggle to escape?

Thus in place of the raptorial pouncing upon life which takes as its motto "Amor Fati" and encourages us to treat the universe as our prey, why should we not use that far subtler—and in the end far more formidable—magic of the old Taoists and turn our Heraclitean battle-spirit against life and on behalf of that very "Beyond Life" which Nietzsche so roundly curses as the non-existent refuge of all misfits?

Such a mood might take as its battle-cry, not Amor Fati, but Contemptus Fati, not Love of Fate, but Contempt of Fate.

There are indeed three phases of this abysmal struggle of the self with the not-self.

The first phase is the idealistic one, of superimposing a softer, sweeter, purer, lovelier, more beautiful world of reality over and above the world we know. This vision of things has a tendency to collapse when

the horrid doubt assails us as to whether there is such a thing as this "other" world at all.

The second phase is the Nietzschean one of trying to force yourself to accept in its totality, and even to "love"—or at least to make the gesture of "loving"—the world as we know it.

The third phase is, it might seem, the one towards which we are now engaged in feeling our way; the phase, namely, of fighting to escape the immediate pressure of life, not with the prospect of any nicer, softer, sweeter world in the background, but with the calm, austere, exultant expectancy—the expectancy of Matter itself—of the dissolution of this present Shadow-Play and its absorption in a condition of things so completely unthinkable that words like "nicer," "softer," "more beautiful," as applied to it, would be meaningless.

But though this "Contemptus Fati" that we propose to set over against the Nietzschean "Amor Fati" can only share the expectancy of the elements, as far as any "Better World" is concerned, it can at least display the nature of its life-warfare by the character of those objects of contemplation which it selects in place of other potentialities of activity.

We too have war in the abysses of our consciousness; but it is orientated in a diametrically opposite direction



from the Nietzschean one. Our war is undertaken on a bolder and a more drastic assumption at the very start; the assumption, namely, that the universe is malleable, not only by action but by thought.

The consciousness of the human mind has a reach of awareness that includes the threshold, though no more than the threshold, of unknown dimensions of Being. These unknown dimensions of Being—like Kant's "Thing-in-Itself"—occupy a certain horizon in consciousness; although no more can be said of them than that they exist.

But by turning away from the crowd's frivolities, by putting aside the itch of competition, and the tickling irritation of success, by putting aside, in fact, every worldly anxiety except the one that only a Saint can avoid, the anxiety about having food and shelter and security and peace of mind, the man who has made the happiness of mental liberty, rather than the pleasure of possessions, the chief aim of his life can find in this threshold of the Unknown—although it can never be more than a threshold—a constant refuge and escape.

Plato promises us an ecstatic madness to be attained from the Contemplation of his super-mundane Ideas. Aristotle brings us down to the calmer happiness of that rational "good life" which avoids all unintelligent

and barbaric extremes. Schopenhauer calls upon us to renounce the Will to Live in one grand spiritual reversion; while Nietzsche, using Schopenhauer as his stepping-stone, not only reinstates that "Will to Live," but double-charges it with a yet more extreme life-lust in the form of his own "Will to Power."

How much subtler than any of these and how much nearer the real intimate nerve of personal experience, is that profound Taoist doctrine of becoming like air as we yield, and yield, and yield again; of becoming like water, as we sink, and sink, and sink again; until by the method of yielding and debouching, of drawing back and making detours, of dissolving like clouds and returning again like mist, we really achieve a magical self-realization, far beyond anything that can be gained by Plato's holy madness, or Aristotle's good life, or Schopenhauer's Nirvana, or Nietzsche's "Amor Fati."

For the habit of mind that I am trying to disentangle from all these others does not aim, like Schopenhauer, at the negation of the "Will to Live." It aims at reducing the "Will to Live" to such bare, stark, simple, primeval satisfactions that its desires *can be fulfilled*.

This is the whole secret of the practice of Elemen-

talism: it obtains happiness by the most rigid and austere simplification of the means to happiness. A person may know that he is advancing, for example, in the true direction when he can get as great a thrill from walking along a muddy or a dusty road as from walking over soft green grass; when he can get as much happiness from seeing a tuft of waving grass-blades reflected on a bare stone, as from a woodland glade that is like the sky itself by reason of its masses of bluebells.

It is by a process of simplification carried constantly further and further that happiness is won. Having once aroused in our mind enough faith in our own will-power to create a universe of contemplation and forget everything else, there are few limitations to the happiness we may enjoy.

And we have a right to narrow down our universe ever further and further; until like the world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* it is made up of certain simple endurances, enjoyments, mental and physical struggles, surrounded by the washing of the sea, the blowing of the wind, the swaying of the wheat, the falling of the rain, the voyaging of the clouds, and the motions of sun and moon and dawn and twilight.

And so, when we are really desperate, harassed and at bay and fooled to the top of our bent, when we

are surrounded by people and objects that dry up the very life-springs of our spirit, it is a magical trick to think of our head as a skull and of our body as a skeleton. And this skull and this skeleton we can feel into actual relation with the wind and the rain; into actual relation with the ploughed-up land, into actual relation with the overhanging sky.

If what has made us unhappy, if what has given to our faces this strained, worn, hunted, nervous look, is the pressure around us of too much life, why should we not by a narrowing down and a simplifying of our contemplative field of vision strip our environment of its convulsed expression? It is this that has got upon our modern nerves—though in our perverted state we cling to it like a vice—and it is this that we must strip off by the simple method of habitually disregarding it.

There is too much expression. On all sides we are aware of too many things—and nearly all of them moving too fast! All this modern hubbub about self-expression is a sign of the disease. What we want is not more self-expression but less self-expression! The self is most deeply itself—as the Taoists taught—when it liberates itself from the necessity of all this “expressiveness” and just flows like water, floats like air,

melts imperceptibly into the immemorial strata of aeons-old rocks.

The hour has come when the human mind should recognize its magic power; its power, not of expression, but of escape; not of self-realization, but of self-transmutation.

Like that crafty old sea-god, Proteus, the God of all Elementalists, we ought to cultivate the art of becoming clouds and vapour for our enjoyment, and then—on the approach of alien selves—hard, round, impenetrable pebble-stones, at the bottom of a babbling river of propitiation.

What voices are these, O wretched, hunted, lonely spirit, child of the eternal elements, that even at this moment are only divided from you by a few feet of brick and cement; what voices are these? Carried by incredible science through the heart of the ether they are the crowd-voices, the advertising voices, the comical voices, the topical voices, the voices of the murderers of solitude.

"Kekitti-kax, koax koax!" croaks the frog-throat of the Great Invention. If we take "the wings of the morning" still shall we hear the voice of the Announcer:—"The gods are dead and Matter is dead and the Spirit is dead." Is there no escape from this terrible voice, no escape from the "thought-aura," of all this megalopolitan barbarism?

Hush! This crowd-voice is, after all, only one impression among many others, reaching you from the vast pressure of the Not-Self. You have learnt the trick of isolating your soul from what you see. Now you must learn the trick of isolating your soul from what you hear!

All your senses are under the control of your mind. Nothing can affect you except through your mind. That is the whole situation. It is a war to the death between your mind and what separates it, in this gregarious modern world, from the cool, calm reservoirs of Eternal Being, out of which your mind originally sprang.

Well; you have worked the miracle now; and although the Radio is still in full blast—"Kekitti-kax, koax, koax!"—and the automobiles are hooting, and the machines are clattering, and the self-expressionists are chattering about sex, you are alone with the Inanimate; you are a conscious self once more, alone with the elements out of which all consciousness arose; you, a nucleus of Mind, are alone with primordial Matter. —

And, as you think of yourself—and of all this noise and folly around you—being borne along on our much-enduring planet through boundless space, a cold, austere exultation will possess you, and comforted and

sustained by that Non-Human which is your substitute for an all-too-human God, you will be able to return to your environment with a placidity and a good-nature that nothing can disturb.

But how can this lonely habit of life which keeps so constantly before the mind those aspects of the planetary situation, those aspects of the chemistry of earth, air, water, fire, which in their elemental simplicity are so porous to the mystery behind the world, deal with the kind of domestic tyranny for which we use the inappropriate word "prosaic"?

Prosaic? On the contrary, to the contemplative mind that has learnt to see its fellow-creatures *Sub Specie Aeternitatis* and under their tragic aspect of pathetic offspring of Time and Space, any domestic routine becomes a challenge to the deepest and most exciting powers of the mind. It is in domestic affairs more than anywhere else that this habit of mind, for which the word "Elementalism" is not in the least too austere, finds its supreme test.

What is the chief cause of the ruin of so many ménages, of the poisoning of so many impassioned loves? Immorality? Unfaithfulness? Not at all! These things are the opiates and panaceas for a much more subtle malady.

What is wrong is not the death of passion; for passion was bound to die. It is the absence of what might be called philosophic lust between the former lovers! Yes; what is wrong is the absence of that detached, brooding contemplation of the infinite mystery and pathos of the difference of sex in the other which enables that difference to be unceasingly—even when youth has passed—provocative and appealing.

What is wrong is that both parties to these unhappy unions are not aiming at happiness at all, but at a series of pleasures which are really interruptions of happiness. They are individual pleasure-seekers, tied arm to arm and leg to leg! But it is just this knot tying them so uncomfortably together that the flesh hurts, which is relaxed till neither feel it, when each can see the other as a tragic skeleton, clothed upon by a brief gallantry of blooming flesh, but in reality as patient, as enduring, as inarticulate, as much "under the form of Time and Space," as the rocks that were blasted to build their house.

This is the miracle that we need philosophy to work for us. "Can philosophy make a Juliet?" Certainly it can! And it can make a Romeo too—yea! and a Hamlet—who would be much wiser in their treatment of the "accursed spite" of fate and chance than were those hapless ones in the plays. The mind is the great



magician; and if even one of two lovers, whose happiness is going to pieces in the natural decline of passion, has the habit of thought—or something like it—indicated in this book the worst issue might become the best.

It is that smooth-false-fox-glove self-pity that does the harm. "What is this? Is it I who have found an unsatisfactory mate? Is it I—chosen by God, by Nature, by Destiny for constant felicity—who am so disillusioned?"

Wretched magician that you are! Here is the tragic skeleton you have erstwhile loved so tenderly, and now you cannot detach yourself enough from your grievances as even to spare an ounce of pity for it. All must be for yourself—all—all! It is extraordinary what a rare thing in the world pity is—except as applied to oneself!

It is something to pity those who are obviously hit and hurt; for to pity blood-stains and tears is not given to all. But the rare achievement, the philosophical achievement, is to pity the tragic human skeleton under the flesh of the healthy, hulking fool and under the flesh of the plump, buxom scolding shrew! Pity of this planetary kind cannot be acquired except by detaching yourself entirely from the pressure of the human crowd. But it is not only with this planetary

pity—all the more tender and powerful because it is touched with something impersonal and non-human—that we can work our mental magic against the tribulations of domestic life.

The whole trend of this particular habit of mind among lonely souls which I have tried to isolate in this book from other habits of mind is to take all the details of ordinary human life in their starkest, barest, and most simple form, and to so emphasize them and strip them of their accessories and fripperies, that they can be visualized against their true background—which is not the fashionable room or the squalid house, but the air, the earth, the sky, the sea.

There is no other way of getting the full poetic flavour out of events, objects, situations which fall into a routine whose repetition tempts you to take them for granted than by this kind of detachment. You can enjoy them aesthetically; that is one thing. You can enjoy them with a healthy, humorous, animal zest; that is another thing. But until you grow habitually aware of all these daily events, these meetings at meal-time and so forth, as occurrences that stand out against this elemental background, you will find it very difficult to catch the real tragic significance of human life.

Turn away then for a moment from the faces in

your factory; turn away from the faces gathered about your table; turn away from the faces in the store, in the theatre, in the picture-house; turn away from all the faces in the world, and as you shut your eyes upon humanity—for a moment, only for a moment—call up a vision of the grey-misted, vast-rocking, desolate horizons of the Mid-Atlantic. Call up, out of your memory, that indescribable look, limitless and yet monumental, which the night-sky assumes, when you can see that pale, sad, eternal river, the Milky Way, flowing across the Zenith.

With our malice, with our lies, with our revolt against life, let us press against these thresholds, these barriers, these sublime backgrounds of our endurance. Listen intently to these dark waters, to those illuminated gulfs, and take note now of what you feel.

Pain, anxiety, distress, slip away from us like a torn and bleeding skin. We are alive, and yet on the edge of something else. We are conscious, and yet on the edge of something else. It is now nothing to us that in our mortal life we have made no mark among men; that we shall perish unknown, unregarded, even as we have lived! It is now nothing to us that we are but one solitary consciousness among uncountable millions of consciousnesses, dead, living, and as yet unborn.

## THE SELF AND THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE

Something has stirred within us that transvalues all our values, transcends all our personal cravings. The impersonality of the Inanimate, which has been sharing our vigil all our days from its sublime patience, seems at last on the edge of whispering to us the lost clue.

The "Wait! wait!" of Matter's eternal reiteration, the "How long? how long?" of the tragic expectancy of the whole astronomical universe, are rendered the more prophetic of some tremendous issue in proportion as each individual spirit abdicates its human tenure, retreats into the elements, and shares, incognito, its fate with the Inanimate.

Close this book and release your soul upon the rain that streams against your window. You are within walls; but there is rain upon the journeying wind; rain that brings a sense of moss-covered stones, of blind, dark turf, of vast rondures of drenched horizons.

You are wrong, Lucretius. Every religion that has ever lifted up a human heart is true, *where truth alone matters.*

Favete linguis! Give yourself up to the rain and the wind and the night; for the burden of Matter is the in-drawn breath of a word that may change all.

THE END